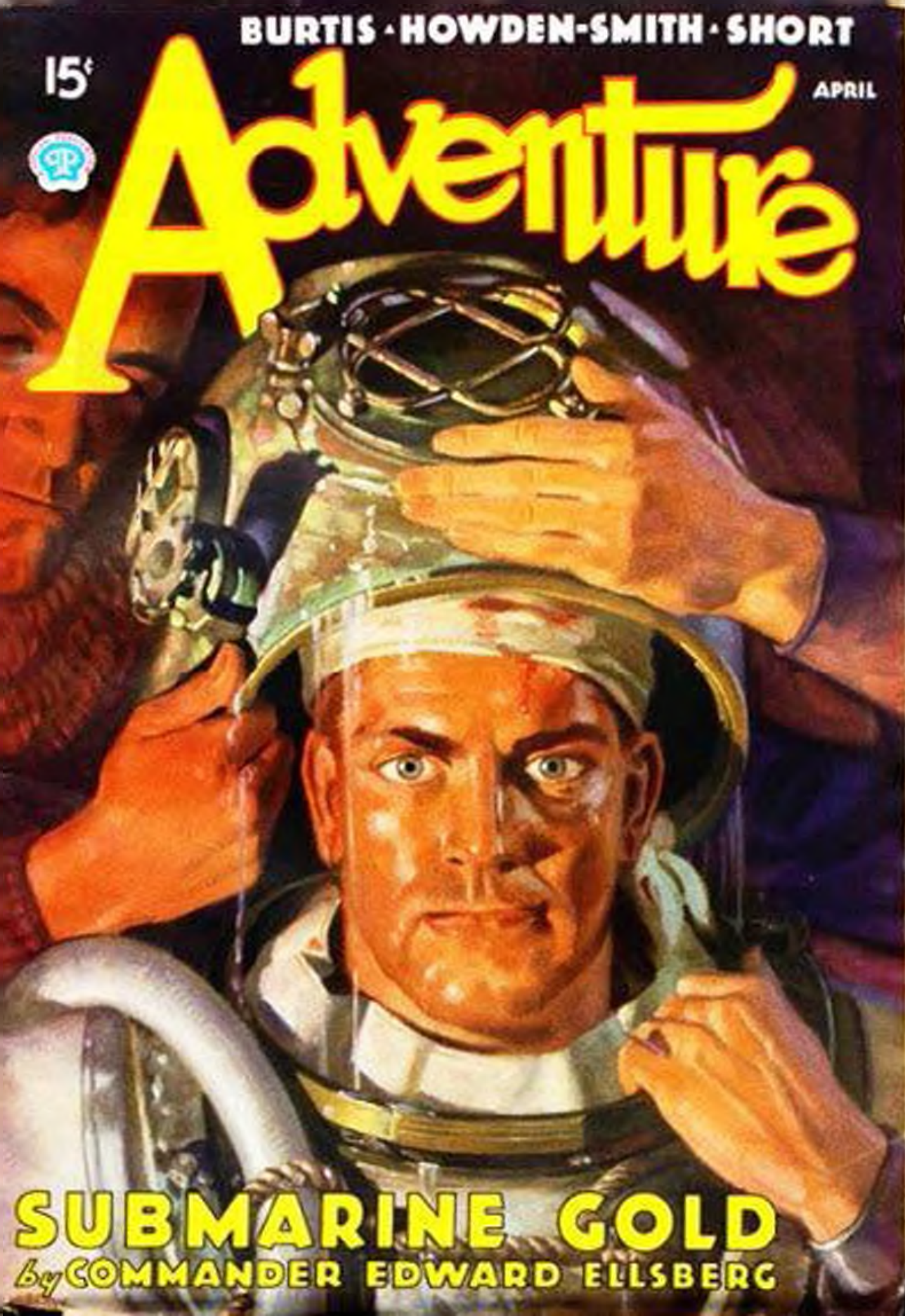
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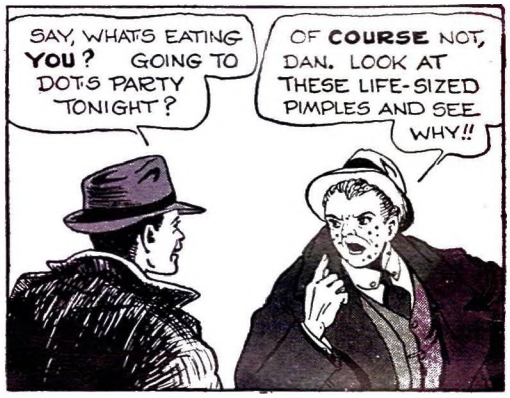

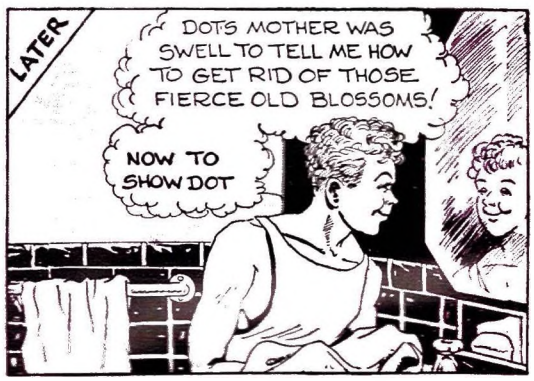

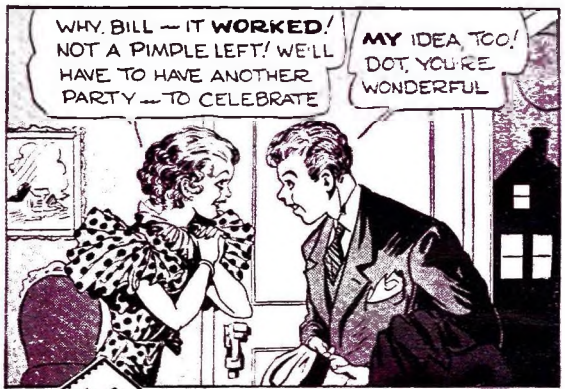

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Beginning

SUBMARINE GOLD

CHAPTER I

MUTINY'S TOLL

DISMALLY Phillip Ramsay's eyes wandered over the *Lapwing's* shattered quarterdeck. Torn deck plates, twisted steel beams, hatches ripped wide open, towing bitts leaning drunkenly to starboard, loose rivets scattered everywhere—the fantail was a scene of destruction to sicken any seaman's heart. Mercifully, the brief tropical twilight was swiftly fading, blotting from sight the details of the wreckage. Ramsey's shoulders drooped despairingly as he regarded the damage.

"*Amigo mio,* we are lucky!"

Ramsay looked up. At his side, with a hand reaching sympathetically toward his shoulder, stood Don Diego Arenda.

"Lucky we're still alive, if that's what you mean by luck, *señor,*" Ramsay stretched his huge shoulders, felt Arenda's hand slip suddenly away as his tall frame straightened up against the deckhouse.

"Look at that deck!" exclaimed Ramsay bitterly. "A thousand miles from Panama, four million in gold for'ard in our holds that we saved from those damned pirates only by the grace of a little TNT—and now we've got to steam in, if we can, with the stern of this spit-kid held together by not much more'n a coat of boot-topping." He gritted his teeth. "If you've got any religion left, Don Diego, pray for calm weather over

A five part serial

By Commander Edward Ellsberg

Author of "On the Bottom," "Pig Boats," etc.

the next few days, or the old *Lapwing's* stern won't hang together till we get back to civilization!"

Arenda shrugged. "The weather? God knows! But for ourselves, still I say we are lucky. Four million dollars in bullion! It is still safely ours. And if you had to blow up your stern to quell the mutiny and save the ship from that Sorensen, at least you won. We will get back, *capitán*, never fear! How many are we yet, eight? *Si?*"

Eight? Ramsay, his eyes fixed vacantly on the gaping hole where the bulging deck was torn asunder, counted mentally. Frank Martin, Tom Williams, Bill Clark, Joe Hawkins, his divers, they made four. Mike Reilly, the engineer, and "Sparks" Leroy, radioman—that made six. And with Arenda and himself, eight. Eight men to work the remains of the *Lapwing* back to Panama, eight only left out of the thirty he had brought to El Morro Island to salvage the treasure of the *Santa Cruz!*

He leaned back against the superstructure, gazed across the gently heaving seas to the pinnacle of El Morro, vaguely discernible a league off against the rapidly darkening sky. Only six weeks since first he had spotted that rock in the Pacific, had commenced to sweep the depths for the long-lost hulk of the *Santa Cruz.*

His head dropped; he rubbed his throbbing temples. Six weeks? Six centuries, it seemed to him, of struggle in the depths, of battling with the seas,

of divers toiling on the bottom, recovering that gold from the hulk of the ancient Spanish galleon. And then, with the job practically done, mutiny, with Sorensen, crazed at the sight of so much gold, leading the crew in seizing the ship. Malignantly his eyes searched the blackness of the gash in the deck. Somewhere below, lashed hand and foot, lay Sorensen now, amidst the wreckage which the demolition bomb, hurled by Joe Hawkins through a side port into the faces of the assembled mutineers, had made of the fantail. In the smoke of that explosion, the mutiny had suddenly ended. Half the mutineers were dead and over the side now, with a grate bar lashed to each calloused foot; the others, wounded and disabled, Ramsay had marooned on nearby El Morro. All except Sorensen, that is. Sorensen, damn him, was going back with them to Panama to face the law. Death and destruction had stalked the *Lapwing* because of his cupidity. The gallows in Colon would soon even that score.

Gingerly he gripped the ragged edge of the bulwark, looked over the side, drew back with a sigh of relief. "That shell damage is mostly well above the waterline; with a little break in the weather—" He looked longingly off in the gathering darkness to the eastward. "Callao's hardly a hundred miles due east, Don Diego. What's the chances of our getting away with it if we put in there for repairs?"

"Por Dios, señor!" Arenda's voice cut sharply through the darkness. "In Peru, with this revolutionary government, my life, she is worth not *un centavo!* In New York, for months before we sailed, I was suspected, spied on, trailed. I am of the old regime in Peru, *capitán,* remember that. My friends in Lima, where are they? In prison, if they are not yet lined up against a wall. And the *Lapwing* herself? In New York she was searched before we sailed as a suspected gun-runner. That I am on her will make her doubly suspect in Callao. How will you explain this wreckage?

"And if they search the *Lapwing* and find the gold!" Arenda's hands waved excitedly in Ramsay's face. "The *Santa Cruz,* from which we salvaged gold, sailed three hundred years ago from Callao; that gold came once from Lima. And El Morro, this *isla* off which we work, she belongs also to Peru. True, we salvaged these ingots on the high seas, over a league offshore, but can you explain that to those bandits who have seized the power in Lima from the true government?" He shrugged his shoulders expressively. *"Madre de Dios,* no! With an empty treasury, they will consider only that the Holy Virgin has performed a miracle for their benefit!" The little Peruvian, his olive face glowing in the twilight with his vehemence, paused a moment for breath, then continued more slowly. "No, *señor capitán;* not till that gold is landed in the United States will we be safe. We dare not make port elsewhere first."

A trifle reluctantly, Ramsay gave way. "Panama it is, then. Let's get for'ard."

SLOWLY Ramsay picked his way through the coils of frayed mooring hawsers and the tangle of diving hoses littering the torn deck. Unusually tall, with his broad face and shaggy eyebrows further accentuating his size, the ungainly manner in which his massive frame sidled through the wreckage made him appear decidedly awkward. Ducking under the diving stage, still swinging idly from the boom over the starboard passageway, he cleared the quarterdeck at last and started forward, Arenda at his heels. Abreast the recompression tank, useless now that diving was over, Ramsay came on a little knot of men, the remainder of his crew. Anxiously he surveyed them.

Nearest to him stood Tom Williams, once a gunner's mate. Tom was a sorry

sight. The wide-set gray eyes which gave him ordinarily that poise which distinguished him as a diver, those calm, reflective eyes whose last glance always gave Ramsay a sense of confidence when it was Tom's helmet which was being slipped on just before a dive, were bloodshot now, half closed, and wholly lusterless. Tom's head was swathed in bloody rags; over his left eye a huge lump protruded, purplish green and black, with the discoloration spreading to his cheek. Tom leaned weakly against the bulkhead, tenderly massaging the welt where Sorensen, catching him unawares at the start of the mutiny, had laid him out by a savage blow from a marline-spike. Ramsay shook his head; they could expect little aid in working the ship for some time from Tom.

He shifted his glance. Frank Martin, what about him? It was Frank, coming up on decompression from the last dive, hanging in the depths at the hundred foot stage to allow some of the absorbed air of his system to work out, whom Tom had been tending over the side when the mutiny broke. And it was Frank who was left helplessly dangling when Tom collapsed on deck, knocked out cold.

When the crew, flushed with their first success, had temporarily withdrawn, Ramsay had managed to drag Frank up from the deep, but without the slow decompression by stages which every man subjected to heavy pressure on the bottom must have if he is to escape "the bends." A little pressure they had been able to give Frank after the mutiny was quelled, when once Reilly, their engineer, had an air compressor going again. How much good had it done him?

Ramsay looked sharply at Martin, huddled on a dressing bench jammed under the gauge board of the "iron doctor," the recompression tank, and breathed a little more freely. Frank had been hurriedly cut out of his diving rig only a few hours before, unconscious, convulsed by "the bends," with his stomach covered with dark blotches where myriads of tiny blood vessels had ruptured from the sudden release of pressure, and likely to pass out any minute if sufficiently large air bubbles formed to clog the heart valves and block his circulation. Now, however, he was obviously coming round. The pressure in the "iron doctor" had forced the air to redissolve in his blood, eliminated the bubbles, restored a normal flow of blood; and the gradual diminution of the pressure, step by step till it was down to atmosphere again, had finally given the air in his veins a chance to free itself evenly, without danger.

Wan and exhausted, too weak to stand, he sprawled out on the bench, eagerly drinking in air; but to the skipper's practised eyes, all danger from "the bends" was past. Frank was safe, but like Tom, nearly useless to him.

But Joe and Bill were all right. Joe Hawkins, for long years a torpedoman as well as a diver; slight, almost boyish, quick of movement, hardly a hundred and thirty pounds in diving underwear; but as fast in thinking as he was on his feet, who had saved the day by his skill in timing the fuse on that demolition bomb so that it burst, still in air, right in the faces of the mutinous crew before a single man had a chance to flee. Joe had come through without a scratch. And nonchalant Bill Clark, his bosun's mate, stocky, red-faced, large of fist and sullen of countenance, lolled there against the bulwark, looking enquiringly aft at his captain for orders—nothing the matter with him either.

"Where's Leroy?" asked Ramsay.

"Up in the radio shack, cap'n," answered Bill. "His ears are still ringin' from that explosion an' I sent him up to caulk it off till mornin'."

Wearily Ramsay took a last look round the deserted deck. "Now get below yourselves, boys, and turn in. No watches tonight, so make the most of it.

This'll be the last decent rest you'll get till we raise Panama." He turned, squeezed his shoulders through the door in the deckhouse, looked down on the engine room grating, sang out, "Below there, Mike!"

"Aye, aye, sor!" replied Reilly.

"Secure that boiler, Mike, and shut down everything. Turn in till we call you to get under way in the morning. After that, if you get any sleep, you'll have to grab it between tending water and oiling the main engines!"

CHAPTER II

ESCAPE

SLOWLY, painfully, with infinite effort, Nils Sorensen flexed his shoulders, twisted his hips, tried to time his struggles with the uncertain rolling of the *Lapwing* to the long Pacific swells. Each move was a torture. His forehead was badly seared from the explosion; his ears still rang from the impact of that blast; his jaw ached from the blow with which the bosun's mate had knocked him flat when the ship's officers had rushed the dazed mutineers. And worst of all, cutting deep into his swollen wrists and ankles was turn on turn of marline with which Clark had seized him up, leaving him helpless as a log stretched out on the orlop deck there in the ruined fantail, arms trussed behind his back and for good measure lashed tightly in to his waist. Face down, his nose groveled in the starboard bilges, where Clark had contemptuously shoved him with a final thrust of the knee when the last knot in the marline was hauled taut.

Uh-h! With a push of his bare toes on the steel plates and a tremendous heave of his shoulders, timed with the roll of the ship, Sorensen teetered a moment on his right side, turned face up. A grunt of satisfaction, then a stifled groan as his frame came heavily down on his swelling wrists and sent agonizing pains shooting through his numbed hands.

Sorensen lay still a moment, stared dully upward through the blackness. Overhead a ragged opening in the deck framed a fragment of sky, swinging rhythmically back and forth, back and forth, as the *Lapwing* rolled. A few stars, part of the Southern Cross, glittered there, faintly illuminating the broken steel above and a patch of deck below.

For an instant only he watched; then once more began straining at the lashings on his wrists. He must get free, get clear of the *Lapwing* tonight or it was all over with him. Complete silence on the ship told its own story—the worn-out remnant of her crew had all turned in. Now all hands were dead to the world. Astern was the motor dory secured for the night on a painter. But the *Lapwing* once under way, someone would always be on watch, the motor dory would be hoisted in, his chance of escape gone. Desperately, his dilated eyes searched the dark compartment. If he could get free, Callao was only a hundred miles away, not much to make in a small boat. Or failing that, El Morro Island was only a league off—he could swim that in a pinch.

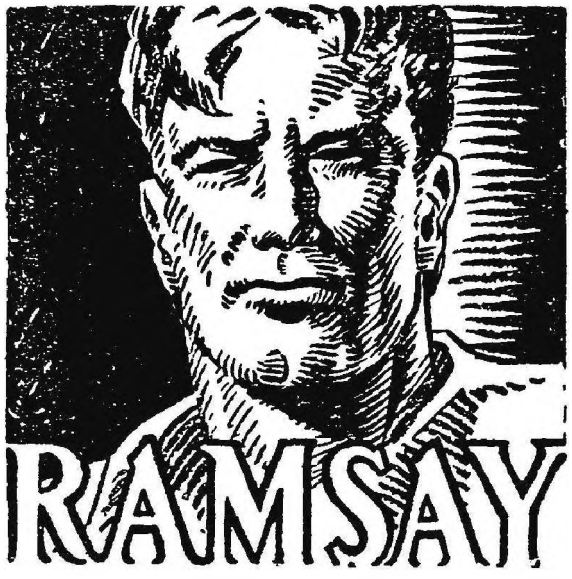
But no—he recollected. Not El Morro. His shipmates were there. Those left alive after the battle, hurriedly marooned by the skipper: Dago Pete, Francisco, Jenks, half a dozen more. No—not El Morro!

Lashed as he was, his body shuddered as he recalled the malignant glare in Francisco's eyes passing on his way over the side into the small boat; the bared fangs of Dago Pete struggling to break away from the bosun's grip in a wild attempt to wreak vengeance on the Swede; even the muttered curse and the kick which that despised Cockney, Jenks, had given him.

Ashore with them on El Morro, his life was not worth a cent. Better the

gallows in Colon. On El Morro, they would make short work of him for bungling the mutiny—not so much perhaps for the death of their comrades nor even for their own injuries, but for letting the treasure of the *Santa Cruz* slip through their fingers when once it seemed so safely in their hands. Four tons of golden ingots kicked away!

Oh, he knew his mates, how they would handle the job! No quick knife thrusts, no free-for-all, with the Swede going down finally under a heap of human wolves snarling at his windpipe — no. He saw himself staked out under the burning sun on the torrid sands, smeared with wild honey, ants swarming over his eyes, up his nostrils, over his parched tongue — while Francisco and his mates taunted him about the golden hoard he, Nils, had once dangled before their inflamed imaginations.



His writhing fingers, straining muscles, got him nowhere. Half audibly, he cursed the marline coils, cursed Clark. The knots held. There was not a chance in the world now to drag his swollen hands through those loops. Clark had done a seagoing job.

Hopelessly Sorensen gave up the struggle for a moment, lay still, while his straining eyes, dilated in the darkness, searched the broken compartment. A few smashed bits of mess table littered the deck; in the shadows of the background he made out vaguely a tangled heap of mattresses and bunks, overhead the ruptured deckplates bulged upward, a ragged border for his glimpses of the sky.

Painfully he twisted his neck sidewise and scanned the orlop deck on which he lay. He could see hills and hollows in buckled plates, where the frames below had sagged under the force of the bursting bomb. Amidships, dimly visible in the starlight, a stanchion, torn from its fastenings to the orlop deck, still clung to the longitudinal overhead—a sinister pendulum, swaying erratically as the vessel rolled.

Its motion caught Sorensen's eye; fearfully he watched, wondered, if it tore free, as every instant it threatened to do, if it might land on him, crush in his chest. Probably not; he was too far back from that gap in the deck. And then as he stared at it, fascinated, the spot in the deck from which the base of that stanchion had been torn caught his eye. Sticking up from the deckplate, four glistening points in the starlight, were the rivets which had pulled through the stanchion foot, their countersinks sheared off, ragged shanks protruding an inch or more above the steel.

SORENSEN'S gray eyes contracted sharply, focused on those rivets. His heart thumped madly. Life, freedom, perhaps riches, he visioned glittering on those raw edges! With an effort he swung his shoulders inboard, jammed his toes against the side, pushed hard. Awkwardly he arched his back, braced his bare heels against the deck, gained a few inches. Like a wounded snake he wiggled—undulating shoulders, hips and knees working desperately, taking ad-

vantage as best he could of every roll of the ship to port, of the plate edges to brace his heels against as he strove to force his body inward. Ten feet to go—it took an hour's herculean work before his straining, sweating torso slid finally to the ship's centerline with the small of his back resting on those rivets.

There, with the dangling stanchion hanging directly over him, sure death if it tore loose now, Sorensen's labors recommenced. With rigid neck and tautened back muscles, he arched his body over the deck, while his bound wrists fumbled blindly behind him to locate one only of those jagged points. A sharp gash on one hand. He had found what he sought; he forced his lashed arms downward.

Grimly his wrists sawed back and forth across the protruding rivet, cutting flesh and marline impartially as he pressed down. The hemp was deeply buried now in the flesh; the rivet, round and wide, was no thin implement. Try as he might to hold only the marline to the rough edge, the rope became slippery with his blood. But it was that or a halter around his neck. Straining, Nils arched his back a little more, sawed viciously away.

A strand of marline snapped. The bonds loosed a trifle; his wrists came a little apart, exposed the marline better. Feverishly he pressed his advantage, continued cutting. Another moment, the hempen strands let go and his wrists flew apart. With a snarl of satisfaction he brought his aching arms from behind his back and pushed his throbbing trunk to a sitting position, dragged himself hurriedly clear of the menacing stanchion overhead. Getting his legs free now was relatively simple, quickly over. Slowly, agonizingly, he staggered to his feet, luxuriated in his new-found freedom.

But not for long. The night was passing. By daybreak he must have the motor dory far down below the horizon, safe from search, thirty miles away at least. And there was work to do before he left. That gold forward—at the thought, his head swam. A few hours before he had had it in his clutches. Far less than ever now could he permit Ramsay and Arenda to get away with it.

Single-handed he could do little on the *Lapwing*, but what he had learned about Arenda from Francisco—that was the answer. But he must get action from Callao before the *Lapwing* could escape from the vicinity—better yet, if she could be seized before her skeleton crew could even get her under way. It was hardly yet midnight. The wireless—he licked his dry lips, crawled painfully up the ladder to the main deck. He must risk it before he left the ship.

On deck he paused a moment, gazed thankfully at the moonless sky, then peered cautiously up the passage, scanned the superstructure. Not a light, not a sound. His bare feet padded up the passage, he came amidships to the steep ladder up the deckhouse, started to ascend, stopped abruptly, fumbled involuntarily at his hip. For Leroy, the radioman, he had nothing but contempt. Two hundred pounds of flabby fat, that was all—with only his bare hands he could silence Leroy.

But what he needed now was not silence, but compliance. And for that, fear was necessary. Well, he had got action once from Leroy, had frightened him into joining the mutiny; he could do it again in the same way. Only for that a knife was necessary. His fingers came away from the empty sheath at his hip. His knife was gone. Overboard, hours ago. But a knife he must have.

Sorensen reflected a moment, then slid hastily down the ladder, sidled quietly back to the quarterdeck. Swiftly his eyes searched the darkness. Yes. There, half buried under a tangle of hawsers, was a chest of diving gear. He flung clear the coils, threw back the lid, grunted with satisfaction. As he well remembered,

there they were, row on row of diving knives, neatly stowed, sheaths and all. He seized one, with a few twists unscrewed it from its sheath, fondled the stout blade a moment, then slid the oily steel into the empty leather on his hip. Now he was ready for Leroy.

Up the passage again, up the ladder, and he came out on the superstructure. Quietly, carefully he made his way past the spud locker, past the reserve air tank, amidst a maze of diving suits, canvas arms extended on stretchers to dry, flapping in the sea breeze like shrouded ghosts. Cautiously he threaded in and out amongst them. And then the radio shack. It rose before him in the dim starlight, its thick sides insulated to protect the operator from any ship noises. Sorensen licked his lips.

THE door was open. Carefully he slipped up to it, peered in, listened.

All was dark. A few feet away, coming from the bunk across the little room, he caught Leroy's sleep-drugged breathing. Barefooted, with cat-like tread, Nils stepped over sill, unhooked the open door, gently closed it behind him, softly let the latch engage. Only the side port now. With practised fingers, he unhooked it, quietly dogged it down, then dropped the battle port over the glass, lightly screwed the dogs home. Absolute blackness enshrouded the radio room.

In two steps he was alongside the bunk. Out came the knife; his right hand gripped the hilt. His fingers ran over the edge of the bunk, searched gingerly over Leroy's form, stopped at his shoulder an instant, then felt for his neck. Carefully he brought the knife forward, lifted the point, poised it over Leroy's throat.

"Sparks!"

With a start, the radioman awoke, tried to rise. A strong hand gripped his shoulder, pushed him down.

"What in—"

"Still, fool!"

Leroy felt the steel prick his throat, shrank back, panted.

"Who is it?"

"Me, Nils!"

Leroy shivered, lay still.

"Sparks. Yust you turn out, but easy, no noise. Ay ban behin' you close."

Leroy slid from the bunk; in the darkness Sorensen slid up behind him. Once more he felt the knife, this time between his shoulder-blades.

"Listen, Sparks. Ay shove off here damn' soon, but first you radio somet'ing for me. Raise Callao, quick!"

"Callao!" Leroy gasped. "I can't, Nils. The skipper'll kill me if I call that station and it gets out the *Lapwing's* here."

Leroy felt the knife dig into his back.

"Nefer you mind about the skipper, Sparks. Raise Callao, or Ay kill you now!"

Thoroughly cowed, Leroy groped forward to the radio desk, slipped on his receivers, felt for his key, fumbled in the darkness over the board in front of him for the switches, threw in the current. Nothing happened. Leroy's heart bounded hopefully. The boilers were dead. That would let him out.

"There's no power on the ship, Nils; no lights, no nothing. I can't send!"

"You no try monkey tricks on Nils, Sparks. Ay no ban born yesterday. You got stand-by batteries. Cut 'm in."

Leroy groaned, threw in the battery circuit. The motor generator under the table started to whir, the pilot lights on the board flicked on, illuminating the scene.

Leroy saw a hand shoot by his head, seize the call book; behind him he heard the pages turning rapidly over, then silence for a minute.

"The call ban OCI. An' remember, Sparks, Ay ban quartermaster onc't in Svedish Navy; Ay know Morse code. No tricks now. You send yust how Ay tal you, unnerstan'?"

His flabby face quivering, Leroy nodded, adjusted his dials, pressed his key. Dash dash dash—he flashed out the call several times, then threw the switch, listened intently. Finally he looked up.

"Swede, they've acknowledged. What's the message?"

He winced as the knife pressed hard against his back, then started to send as Sorensen dictated in his ear:

"*Minister of Marine, Lima. Urgent. Salvage ship* Lapwing—"

CHAPTER III

PREY OF THE SEA

IN the little cabin abaft the bridge, Ramsay stirred uneasily in his berth. Daylight streamed through the green curtains over the open porthole. Dead tired still, he rolled over, face to the bulkhead, buried his head in his pillow. He needed a rest. Too many nightmares of the crowded day before, of battle, of death and destruction on the quarterdeck, had raced endlessly through his slumbering brain, kept him tossing all night long. And on top of all, insidious whirrings in his ears, more vivid than his other fantasies as he tossed and fancied he heard his radio set sending, a sound so real that partly waked, he half believed he actually *was* hearing it. A dream, of course, faded hours ago.

But it was early yet. Ramsay rolled over, closed his eyes, half-consciously tried to dream about New York, about theaters, gay scenes back home, thousands of miles to the north, about a man-sized bed ashore in which he could stretch his legs, away forever from the undersized boxes they called berths aboard a ship.

A loud rap on the door. Ramsay lifted his head drowsily, but before even he got his eyes open, the door flew back and Joe burst in, seized his shoulder, shook him roughly.

"Cap'n, the motor dory's gone, an' Sorensen's missing!"

Ramsay sprang clear of his bunk, landed wide-awake alongside the chartboard, staring incredulously.

"Sorensen loose? It can't be! The way Bill had him lashed, he could hardly wiggle a finger. Maybe the boat's gone, chafed free, but Sorensen's still down there, you can bet on that!"

"Not this time, skipper; he's gone, I tell you. C'mon aft, see fer yourself."

No need to dress. Ramsay had turned in the night before, clothes and all. He jerked on his shoes, ran aft with Joe, looked over the stern. The boat was gone, all right; only the slack painter was left, dangling in the water below them. Hurriedly the skipper's eyes swept the wide semicircle of white caps to leeward, searching the eastern horizon. Nothing there but sea and sky.

His gaze came back to the rail. Joe was hauling in the painter. Four fathoms, perhaps, came in through the stern chock, then the end. Hawkins held it up, dripping, for his inspection. One look at it and Ramsay's heart sank. No chafing there—just one clean cut, the manila strands neatly severed.

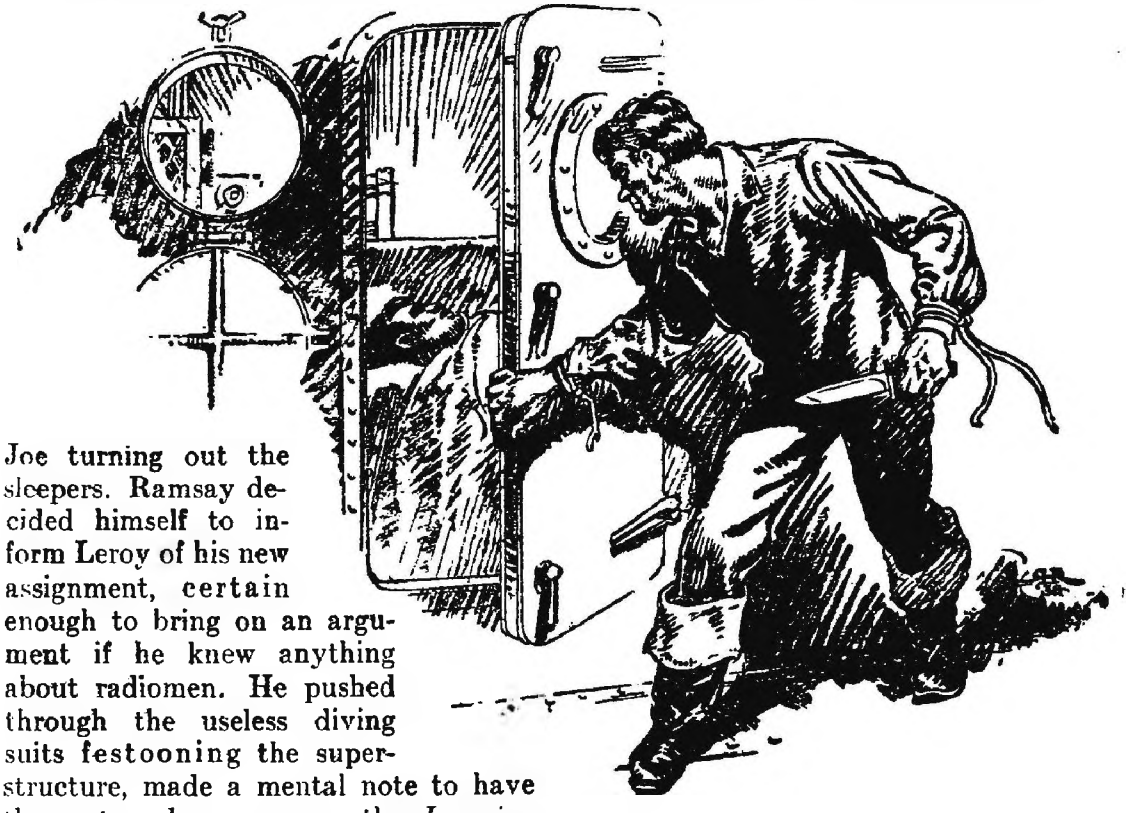
Perfunctorily now, the captain strode a little forward, looked down through the gaping deck into the compartment below which had been Sorensen's prison. A few turns of knotted marline, badly frayed, littered the deck there, tangled around some blood-stained rivets. Ramsay whistled softly. So Sorensen, blast his calloused hide, had achieved the impossible. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you're right. No use wasting time searching; Sorensen's probably deep in that jungle on El Morro by now, and if he hasn't hidden the boat too, he's scuttled it. We'll get under way at once. You give Reilly what help you can in firing up. I'll man the bridge."

Disconsolately, Ramsay turned, started forward. Even with oil, it would take them two or three hours to get up steam on both boilers. He passed the

empty galley. Time for breakfast he reflected, but no cook. Still, just coffee and canned beans would go well, and not much trouble to get. But the *Lapwing* was short-handed now. Whom could he detail as cook with the least interference to watch standing? He hastily ran over the roster of his little crew, mentally checked each man's emergency billet. Well, he had least need for the radio. Leroy was elected.

As he climbed the ladder, he heard



Joe turning out the sleepers. Ramsay decided himself to inform Leroy of his new assignment, certain enough to bring on an argument if he knew anything about radiomen. He pushed through the useless diving suits festooning the superstructure, made a mental note to have them stowed as soon as the *Lapwing* was well at sea, thrust his way to the radio room. Slightly puzzled, he noted the dogged port, then paused in wonder before the closed door. No ventilation at all in that stuffy room? Queer, on a hot night in the tropics. Ramsay rapped on the door, then, remembering it was intended to be soundproof, he turned the knob, swung it open—and stopped, suddenly limp.

There, slumped over the low radio table in a welter of blood, lay Leroy, glazed eyes staring toward him, fingers still clutching his key, the rounded hilt of a diving knife protruding from his back!

For an instant Ramsay gazed, his knees strangely weak beneath him. Then he sprang inside, seized Leroy's outstretched arm. Cold and stiff. Leroy was dead—hours ago!

Badly shaken, Ramsay stepped back, closed the door, stood a moment looking out over the tumbling seas toward the surf breaking on distant El Morro. Boat gone, Sorensen gone, Leroy murdered—what did it all mean? He rubbed his pallid forehead, try to tie it together. Why, of all the crew, had it been Leroy? And then vaguely at first, he recalled his troubled dream of the night before, the whirring of his long-silent radio, which not once during the *Lapwing's* stay off El Morro had he permitted in action.

It was no dream—he *had* heard it! Sorensen had broken free, had forced Leroy to man the key, had killed him

afterwards to hold the message secret. But why? Just one answer. Only one place where any message Sorensen might send would receive the slightest attention. Only one place—but there it would get plenty. And quickly, too. If ever the *Lapwing* could make knots, she must make them now, till they had dropped that pinnacle of El Morro, glistening there in the morning sun, far below the horizon, till his little ship was well on its way north, safe from any search! Steam! They must have it fast! Ramsay galvanized into action. In two jumps, he shot down the superstructure ladder, headed for the engine room. On his way, he bumped into Reilly, looking longingly in at the deserted galley.

"Chow first, sor, 'fore I lights off?"

The skipper grabbed his arm, shook his head.

"Come on, Mike! Below with you, four bells! To hell with chow! Light off first, pronto!" Down the engine room hatch he vanished, the astounded Mike tumbling after. Down the steep ladders to the floorplates, forward through the watertight door in the bukhead. they stumbled in the darkness, squeezed through a black alley and emerged in the fireroom, the flat fronts of the water-tube boilers looming dimly above them in the faint glow filtering down the open gratings round the uptakes.

Instinctively Ramsay looked up at the steam gauges. The forward boiler was cold, no pressure there at all. The after one, the boiler Reilly had secured on turning in? Thirty pounds still showed on that gauge, even with the fire out since the night before.

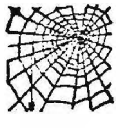
"One benefit of tropic nights, anyway," muttered Ramsay, casting a swift glance upward at the water-glass on the platform. "Maybe they're too hot for sleep, but there's no cold draft going through to kill off steam in the boilers!"

With that much steam and the emergency fuel pump, they could get perhaps fifty pounds pressure immediately on the burners. Reilly started the pump; the pressure on the oil manifold came slowly up. Ramsay seized a torch, dipped it in a pot of oil, held a match to it. The torch flared up; swiftly the skipper thrust it through the lighting port beneath the middle burner, swung the air register wide open, opened the valve on the oil line to the burner tip.

Ramsay watched while the heavy fuel oil, much too cold for decent atomization, sprayed in, and the seconds went anxiously by. Then a loud bang, a mass of flame filled the firebox, the burner started to roar. Ramsay opened the valve wider, gave the burner all the oil it would take, then turned to face the puzzled engineer.

"I'll explain later, Mike. But now we've got to get away from here quick! Never mind normal warming up. Force those fires! If we spring any tubes, we spring 'em! Get every burner lighted off as fast as you can get oil to it—both boilers! As soon as there's steam to turn over the windlass, it's 'Up Anchor!' After that, don't worry how you do it—get the pressure up till the safeties pop and hold it there. You get me?"

"Aye, aye, sor! L'ave it to me." Mike seized another torch, lighted it, thrust it in under the starboard wing burner. "They may leak, cap'n, but I'll kape hell roarin' under them kettles till there's two hun'erd 'n fifty pounds on 'em. In forty minutes. The divil himsilf couldn't do it no quicker!"



RAMSAY grabbed a rung on the fireroom ladder, started hurriedly for the topside. He wormed his way up with difficulty between the uptakes, never meant as a passage for any one his size, ducked his head low under the forced draft blower, and emerged on the port side to bump into Arenda, peering uncertainly through the fireroom door.

"The fat's in the fire now, old man. We've got to make ourselves scarce around here!"

"Por qué?" Arenda, half dressed, looked up at him puzzled. "Joe Hawkins, en gran excitement, he turn me out just now, but he no stop to explain why. *Amigo mío,* what is wrong?"

Ramsay told him.

"Diablo!" Cold fright shone from Arenda's dark eyes. "A radio message? *Por Dios!* To Lima, of course! Where else?" He tossed his unlighted cigarette over the side, sprang to the rail, anxiously scanned the eastern horizon. Nothing but whitecaps in sight there. A trifle relieved, he turned inboard.

"There is yet time, *capitán.* As you say, we must get underway, at once! *Prontissimo,* weigh anchor! Come!" He started running up the passage to the forecastle, his fingers twitching violently as if he meant to seize the cable, heave in the anchor with his two hands.

"No use." Ramsay reached out his long arm, brought him to with a jerk. "No steam yet. Calm down." He turned the shivering Peruvian around, pointed to the galley, smiled grimly. "We'll shove off as quickly as we can, don't worry. The best place for you to lend a hand is in there. Shake up that galley fire, make some coffee for the boys while they're coming up the stoppers on our anchor cables and warming up the windlass." Unceremoniously he thrust Arenda through the galley door, then turned himself to face the little knot of seamen gathered in the waist of the ship.

"You heard, boys?" A chorus of muttered oaths answered him. "El Morro isn't healthy for us any more." He motioned to the bosun's mate. "On the forecastle with you, Bill; cast loose the chain stoppers, clutch in the wildcat, and when there's steam enough to turn her over, heave short! You, Joe, give Bill a hand with the stoppers. Lively now!"

"Aye, aye, cap'n." Clark and Hawkins saluted, ran forward. Ramsay examined the others. Tom Williams, his countenance discolored and swollen, looking worse, if possible, than the day before, stepped forward, steadied himself against

ARENDA

Frank Martin, who, still contorted from "the bends," clung to the bulwark for support.

"We're ready fer duty, too, skipper," mumbled Tom. "Where d'ye want us to turn to?"

Ramsay looked his two casualties over anxiously. How much could they stand? He himself would have to man the throttle in the engine room during the first watch, anyway. No one beside himself, except Reilly, was even remotely familiar with the engines; and Reilly, with all the auxiliaries to get started, was urgently needed in the fireroom till everything there was under control and the ship steaming freely. But he needed a helmsman. Well, in a pinch, they might steer between them, spelling each other, with the wheel to cling to to hold them up. Half shot as they were, they could still do as well as Arenda, who was the only other possibility; but Arenda he badly needed as an oiler in the engine room.

"O. K., boys; on the bridge with you. Tom, you take the wheel. And Frank, you man the telegraphs. Once we're under way and I've got Joe, Bill, and Don Diego broken in enough below to help Reilly as the black gang, I'll lay up myself and give you a hand. Get El

Morro dead astern and head north by east; the speed'll be every last turn Mike and I can squeeze out of the engine."

"Aye, aye, cap'n," muttered Tom, nodding his bandaged head. "Just leave 'er to us! We'll make 'er walk a rhumb line from here to Panama." Uncertainly he swung about, gripped Martin's shoulder. "C'mon, Frank, let's go." The two braced themselves, staggered unevenly up the heaving deck toward the bridge. Ramsay looked affectionately after them, then swung sharply on his heel, strode aft to the engine room hatch, and went below to warm up the main engine.

CHAPTER IV

PURSUIT

"LOOK!" Martin, in the starboard wing of the bridge, craning his neck to see over the weather cloth, dropped his spy glass, pointed excitedly across the rail toward the horizon. "Off our starboard quarter! D'ye make out anything?"

Tom took the glass, lifted it to his good eye, braced himself against the pelorus and struggled with the focus as the long glass wobbled back and forth in his unsteady hands. Finally, in disgust, he dropped his arms, telescoped the glass.

"No use, Frank, one o' my lamps is closed an' the other can just about make out the jackstaff. Anything farther off'n that's just a blur to me. Wot's in sight?"

Once more, Frank opened the glass, squinted expertly through it.

"Smoke, Tom; a big cloud of it. An' headed this way. I can make out her topmasts now, lined up dead for us!" He lowered the glass, sprang for the voice tube alongside the telegraph, punched a button, bellowed, "Engine room, there!"

Back in the shaft alley, refilling the after spring bearing with oil, Ramsay heard the bell ring. He set the oil can carefully down inside the bearing pedestal, clambered forward. Once in the engine room, he straightened partly, skirted the engine to the throttle, lifted the voice tube cover, pressed his lips to the wide bell mouth.

"Engine room, captain speaking." His stomach grew suddenly leaden as Frank's voice echoed hollowly through the tube. "Smoke? Bearing east, you say? And headed for us? Can you make her out?"

"Not yet, cap'n. She's still hull down; must be eight or nine miles off."

"All right, Frank. Keep your glass on her. And get Captain Arenda up from the galley, give him my binoculars, and tell him to take a look. He used to be in the Peruvian Navy. See what he makes of her." He dropped the voice tube cover, looked despondently at the steam gauge on the engine column before him. Only 90 pounds so far; hardly enough to make six knots with. Twenty minutes more at least, for a full head of steam, and by that time, the stranger, if she were what he feared, would be within easy range.

He squeezed into the fireroom. Every one of the five burners on each boiler was blazing, registers wide open; the boiler casings were panting violently under the sudden load. On the grating above, he saw Mike, testing the cocks on water glasses, a cloud of steam and hot water masking him. Nothing more to be done there but wait for steam. Meanwhile, he still had the engine to get ready. He turned back to the comparative silence of the engine room, broken only by the irregular hammer of one feed pump, slowly stroking to hold up the pressure on the main feed line.

One by one, he opened the drains to the engine jackets, to the cylinders, to the main steam line; cracked the main steam stop valve, cracked steam into everything, then with throttle and reverse lever, slowly rocked the engine over, a turn ahead, a turn astern, warming it up, making sure the lines were clear of condensation, that he would

get no sudden water hammer to knock out a cylinder head when once he opened wide the throttle valve.

Another ring on the voice tube bell, cutting sharply through the noise of hissing steam. He screwed home the throttle; the slow-moving piston rods, the shining cranks before him, came to an abrupt stop. Ramsay leaned over the voice tube, caught Arenda's excited tones.

"She ees *la Esmeralda, capitán;* a cruiser, the fastest our navy has in Peru, twenty-two knots speed. I make out even her hull! There ees no mistake!"

The *Esmeralda.* A real cruiser, Ramsay reflected glumly, even if she dated with the old *Olympia* of Admiral Dewey's day. He remembered her history. Built in England, six-inch guns in her main battery—an old coal burner but still good. And what he could shake out of the *Lapwing,* an ex-mine sweeper, even with oil, was fourteen at the most.

There was no hurry now. He called to Reilly, ordered him to ease up on the fires, to come up on pressure the rest of the way normally. What he needed now, he reflected, was diplomacy, not steam. After all, the *Lapwing* was under the American flag, lawfully on the high seas, her papers all in order; he, her captain, a reputable American citizen, an ex-naval officer. That ought to count for something. The spigs would soon see all that, not dare to molest them on nothing more than a wild radio yarn from a fugitive seaman, a story they could not even check unless they searched El Morro for Sorensen. And Sorensen, unless he could make a truce with his shipmates, would not be so easy to find. For the last time, Ramsay poked his head into the fireroom.

"Mike, keep an eye on the engine room now, as well as on the boilers. Everything's warmed up here now, ready for sea. I'm going on deck."

Broad off the starboard beam, not over four miles away now, was the *Esmeralda,* a gleaming white hull standing out clearly against the horizon, coming up with a bone in her teeth, her tall masts swaying as she rolled to a quartering sea, black smoke from her funnels obscuring partly her buff-colored superstructure. A trim cruiser, Ramsay admitted grudgingly.

"No help for it now," he growled. "I'll have to hustle into my uniform and greet these boys in style." With his eyes still fastened on the cruiser, he lumbered forward, his feet automatically picking their way amidst the coils of mooring hawsers flaked down in the passage. Just abaft the bridge, he reluctantly drew his eyes inboard, looked up, sought the ladder. In a little group on the flying bridge overhead he saw Arenda and Martin, only their heads showing above the bridge screen, eyes glued to binoculars and spy glass respectively, leaning far out over the weather cloths, watching the approaching ship. But Tom, towering above his two companions, was staring open-mouthed at their own stack. Ramsay followed his gaze. From their single funnel amidships, there was rolling the thickest cloud of smoke Ramsay had ever seen, short of a destroyer's smoke-screen.

"We sure got steam now, cap'n," cried Tom, spotting Ramsay below. "Bill's standin' by on the fo'c's'le. Should I give 'im the word to heave in, so's we kin run fer it?"

Ramsay shook his head.

"Too late now. We're in for a visit and search, unless I can talk 'em out of it. Break out our largest colors, and hoist 'em at the fore; I think our flagstaff aft went overboard in that explosion. And overhaul your signal flags; I'll be up with the signal book as soon as I've got some decent clothes on." Another thought struck him. "Oh, Don Diego!"

Arenda lowered his glasses, looked down.

"Si, capitán."

"If that cruiser gets close aboard, keep out of sight! And if they send a boat,

for God's sake keep below while I'm talking to the boarding officer!"

Ramsay ducked into his cabin, stripped off his clothes. In the little locker at the foot of his bunk, tucked away behind his other clothes, was his naval uniform. Neatly starched white ducks, gold buttons, braided shoulder marks, gold-laced cap—never since he had resigned from the service five years before had he worn it. Well, he was still a lieutenant in the Reserve, entitled to wear it if he chose.

Hurriedly he drew it on, surveyed himself in the mirror. His face, bronzed in the tropic sun, looked back at him from the glass, strangely dark against the unaccustomed whites. He fingered for a moment the narrow band of bright ribbon on his breast—World War, Haitian Campaign, the D. S. M. In war and peace, he had served his country honorably in those clothes the ribbons showed. Well, he hoped now, facing the Peruvian officers, that uniform would provide the proper background for keeping his ship safe from search, his hard-won treasure safe from seizure.

A FAMILIAR rumble met his ears. Glancing out the port, he saw the *Esmeralda* rounding to, a thousand yards off, parallel to the *Lapwing*. Her port anchor cable was beating out a thunderous tattoo as the links rattled and banged against the hawsepipe. And as he expected, she was cleared for action. Bow and stern, her six-inch guns, tompions out, were slowly rotating as the ship swung, training abeam on him. Even her port broadside battery of five three-inch rifles glowered at him through open casemates. Ramsay smiled sourly at the compliment. What did they think the helpless *Lapwing* was, a dreadnaught? One broadside only from all those guns would toss the luckless *Lapwing* clean over that pinnacle on El Morro.

A mass of foam swirled under the *Esmeralda's* counter; her propellers churned astern, brought her to rest, headed, as was the *Lapwing*, into the wind. Her chain ran out more slowly, stopped. A faint order drifted across the waves. There was sudden activity in the distant crowd of sailors lining the rails. The port quarter davits swung slowly out; a lifeboat dropped flush with the rail. Sailors swarmed through the lifelines, filled the boat; the falls ran out; the loaded boat splashed heavily into the broken water. Oars flashed, the little whaleboat danced over the waves toward the *Lapwing*.

Ramsay took his binoculars from Arenda, leveled them at the boat. Ten men at the oars, three more in the stern, one of these an officer. Nothing to fear yet except a visit; such a small party would never attempt to take a ship by force. He motioned to Bill, standing now with a sledge near the solitary stopper left on the anchor cable, ready at the word to knock free the pelican hook and heave in.

"Belay casting loose, Bill. Get a Jacob's ladder over the side, just abaft the bridge, and when that boat comes alongside, see that we keep it well forward of the fantail. And Joe, bring me my Colt, then serve out the rest of 'em to the other boys. Nobody comes aboard the *Lapwing* but that officer, and I'll take care of him. You boys see that his boat's crew stays put while we're talking." He looked down at Arenda, stooping low beside him. "Better get below now, Don Diego; I've got a fine yarn for these people, but my story'll be knocked into a cocked hat if anyone who knows you spots you here."

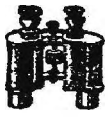
Arenda nodded; still crouching, he left the bridge. Sympathetically, Ramsay watched the vanishing figure. Arenda, who had financed the expedition, sacrificed everything to fit out the *Lapwing*, had a stake in the proceedings far greater than the others. His life itself now hung in the balance. Short shrift for him if he,

who had escaped the bloody battle for the capital in which the revolutionists had triumphed, fell at last into their hands.

The boat was halfway now, tossing irregularly as it breasted the seas, the thump of the oars clearly audible. With interest Ramsay lifted his glasses, scanned the little group of three in the sternsheets. One was the coxwain, standing with feet wide apart to brace himself against the steering oar. Just forward of him, on a boat-cloth spread over the thwart, sat the officer, in whites like himself. With some difficulty, as the whaleboat was dancing erratically in the field of his glasses, Ramsay made out his rank. two stripes only on his shoulder marks—a lieutenant. Good—he ought to be able to hold his own with any lieutenant; no difference in rank to combat.

Idly then he scanned the third figure in the boat, stiffened with a jolt. Sorensen! Incredulous, Ramsay looked again. Sorensen on the *Esmeralda*? But there he was, in ragged trousers only, just as he had escaped from the *Lapwing*, blond hair, fair face, athletic torso with that full-rigged ship in vivid blue sailing across his chest—there could be no mistaking Sorensen.

Like a house of cards, the elaborate explanations he had ready for the boarding officer tumbled about Ramsay's ears. A waste of breath now—that close-knit yarn he had built up about a scientific expedition to the Galapagos; of a leaking drum of gasoline in the afterhold exploding, tearing apart the *Lapwing's* stern, killing half his sleeping crew; of a sailor, crazed from shock, forcing the radioman to send out some message, he knew not what, then murdering him in cold blood and jumping ship. With Sorensen in that boat, what use to talk at all?



HIS head still whirling from the unexpected blow, Ramsay dropped the binoculars, strove to pull himself together. Swiftly he revised his tactics. No chance any more of pacifying the Peruvians, of sailing away with the *Lapwing* unrifled by his enemies. On the cruiser they now knew the facts; the salvaged treasure of the *Santa Cruz* was the *Esmeralda's* goal. And he could neither fight nor run. Strategy was his only hope, to gain a little time, secretly jettison the gold, come back again some day and fish it up when the coast once more was clear.

The boat drew closer. With his naked eyes he could make out the swarthy officer, Sorensen's close-set gray eyes looking up triumphantly, one brawny arm slightly raised, evidently pointing him out to the lieutenant on the thwart beside him.

Anxiously, from his high point of vantage, Ramsay looked down into the whaleboat's hull, hastily scanned it from stem to stern, his eyes searching along the thwarts, among the floorboards, between the bare feet of the sweating oarsmen. Thank God, no rifles! Only the officer had a holster strapped to his leg.

No time to lose. That boat, only a hundred feet away now, must not get alongside. No one in her must set foot on the *Lapwing*. Ramsay leaned over the bridge rail, called sharply down to the bosun's mate making fast the sea ladder between the midship bitts.

"Bill! Haul in that Jacob's ladder!"

Below, Clark paused in his task of throwing a last clove hitch over the forward horn of the bitts, looked up puzzled at the sudden reversal of his orders. But there was no mistaking the look on Ramsay's face. With one jerk the dripping rungs came flying inboard, landed in a heap inside the bulwark.

In amazement, the bow man in the whaleboat, who had already stowed his oar, turned uncertainly and looked aft for orders. He got them, but not from the direction expected. Ramsay, his broad shoulders towering above the *Lapwing's* wind screen, cupped his hands, sang out gruffly.

"Whaleboat there! Lie off! You can't come aboard here!"

In confusion the rowers below lay on their oars; the boat coming in at an angle to the sea, lost headway, started to rock violently; the bow man lost his balance, sprawled heavily backward, knocked down the starboard stroke and sent his oar sailing overboard.

Cursing excitedly, the coxswain came shrilly into action, backed water, bawled out orders, while the crestfallen bow man, roughly flung back on his feet by his angry shipmates, fished over the side with his hook for the lost oar.

On the *Lapwing*, Ramsay took swift advantage of the delay to muster his small force in the waist, all five of them (except Arenda) crouching behind the steel bulwark, pistols hidden, waiting for the next move.

The flustered bow man recovered the oar; a few strokes and the coxswain had his boat straightened up again, head to the seas. Clinging to the rail, the officer half rose in the heaving boat, hailed them in English.

"*Lapwing* there, put over your side ladder!"

"Sorry, *señor:* we're just getting under way. No time for visitors now."

An ugly frown answered him, then an expressive wave of the hand in the direction of the anchored cruiser.

"*Señor capitán*, you waste your words. Put over your ladder. I am Lieutenant Sanchez. I have orders to seize this ship, and take you aboard the *Esmeralda* for examination. You have been diving in Peruvian waters. You have a concession to work here from our government?"

Ramsay straightened up, leaned across the rail, with difficulty stifled his anger. That lieutenant damned well knew there was no concession involved.

"You're not coming aboard here, Lieutenant. We're not in Peruvian waters now and never have been. We're on the

high seas, working on the spot where we're anchored now. If you doubt it, there are our mooring buoys." He pointed to starboard at two gaily painted spars floating off bow and quarter. "You've got range-finders aboard the *Esmeralda*; train them on that pinnacle on El Morro, then on us; they'll show you quickly enough we're well outside your territorial waters!"

"To me, all that is nothing," answered Sanchez. "We have information from this man,"—a trifle clumsily he indicated Sorensen at his side—"and we act on it."

Across fifty feet of open water Ramsay shot a look at Sorensen. He remembered Leroy in the radio shack above, stretched out cold in death, Sorensen's knife still buried in his back. Ramsay's fingers twitched nervously about the butt of his pistol. With an effort he controlled himself, replied:

"Where'd you get that man? He's a liar, a deserter from this ship, and what's more, a cold-blooded murderer! You take his word at your peril. Deliver him up to us and we'll see he gets justice back home!"

Sanchez shrugged his shoulders.

"We are sent to investigate a radio call; on our way we pick him up in an open boat. His story interests our Minister of Marine. I have my orders. You will not put over your ladder? *Muy bien*, we get along without it!" He sat down, turned to the coxswain, spoke in Spanish. The steering oar went hard-a-starboard, the boat crew leaned forward, dipped their oars, and the whaleboat sheered in toward the *Lapwing's* side.

"Keep off!"

Ramsay drew his pistol, leveled it at Sanchez. Simultaneously, five Colts in the hands of his crew rose above the rail, covered the men in the boat. Precipitantly the oarsmen quit pulling, the boat lost headway.

"This is an American vessel, on the high seas! Warship or no warship, you can't force your way aboard—that's piracy! If you've got any complaints to make about us, there's an American Ambassador in Lima; take it up with Washington through him. If you can prove anything, you're welcome. But try to board us and I'll feed your whole damned crew to the sharks! Come on now, if you've got the guts! It'll give me the excuse I've been waiting for to pump that snake there full o' lead!"

Sorensen shrank back behind Sanchez. The latter looked from the menacing muzzles of half a dozen Colts to the determined faces of the men behind them. thought better of boarding. He gave the word to back water until the boat was beyond the range of accurate pistol fire. Then he rose in the boat and megaphoned through his hands:

"*Muy bien, capitán*, it is in your hands. I give you then an hour to think it over while I go to *la Esmeralda*, lower all our boats, and prepare a proper boarding party. In one hour, if you have not surrendered, we return with our whole ship's company of armed men. Resistance will be foolish, but if you fight, your blood will be on your head." He gestured significantly. "There may be no survivors left, *señor*, to make com-

plaints to Washington! For the last time, *capitán*, do you surrender?"

"Go to hell!"

Lieutenant Sanchez shrugged his shoulders, sank back on the boat cloth, motioned to the coxswain. The oars dipped, ahead port, back starboard; the whaleboat spun sharply about on her stern and headed for the anchored cruiser. Across the wind, mingled with the thump of the oars as the rowers lay back, Ramsay caught Sanchez' last words as he leaned far out to leeward.

"Consider quickly, *capitán*! One hour, no more!" Sanchez drew back and was hidden from view by the coxswain.

"WELL, boys, it worked." Ramsay dropped his pistol back into its holster and faced his crew.

"Gonna fight, cap'n?" Belligerently the bosun's mate shook a horny fist at the retreating boat. "We're with you! It'll take more'n a few boatloads o' spigs to capture us. The *Lapwing* ain't so helpless as she looks. Say Joe, wot one o' them demolition bombs won't do in a boatload o' spiggoty gobs! I hope he sends the whole ship's company. They can't use rifles good in a jammed boat tossin' in them waves, an' when we get through with 'em, there won't be enough whole spigs left to go back an' man the *Esmeralda's* guns, or heave coal enough to keep up steam an' chase us! Wot d'ye say, mates?"

Ramsay, surprised, listened to Bill's plan. Good tactics, no question, and a fair chance of success too, if only they could lure the boats all close enough before opening up. Those bombs would make match sticks out of any wooden boat. His own ruined stern was the best evidence of that. But he shook his head.

"Belay the fight talk, boys. We might do what Bill says, but what's the use? D'ye think the *Esmeralda's* the only ship in the Peruvian Navy? We might win the battle, but the war'd be only starting; even if she couldn't chase us successfully, she'd radio for other ships that could. Long before we got to Panama, some other spig would catch the *Lapwing* and line what's left of us up against a bulkhead to save any arguments with sea lawyers when they got back to port. No, we got an hour and that's all I want. We won't waste it getting ready to fight any warships with seven men and this spit-kid. Put up your guns."

"Wot's the good word, then?" Unsteadily little Martin gripped the bitts for support, sheathed his Colt; his wan face looked expectantly up at Ramsay. The captain smiled grimly.

"It's this. We risked our lives on the bottom, diving on the *Santa Cruz* for that gold. No spigs are going to grab it now, and then give us a run-around in their courts till we're gray-haired and broke. Before I argue with the law over salvage, I'll fight the deep sea a dozen times. So back goes the gold, boys; down to Davy Jones' locker once again! But not so's they spot us doing it on the *Esmeralda* there.

"And when it's overboard, we've got to get what's left of the *Lapwing* round the other side of El Morro, head straight out into the Pacific as if we were trying to escape to sea, and when the spigs finally catch up with us, sink her outside the hundred fathom curve in the deepest water we can find. We'll sink her so deep that even Sorensen—who, damn him, is still the best diver in these parts—will see diving's hopeless on her. They'll never find out that the gold's not in her. And some day, months from now, when this has all blown over and El Morro's only a rookery for gulls once more, we'll come back with a new outfit and fish up those ingots once again." Ramsay paused a moment for breath, then continued:

"I'm sorry, boys; I know you're all played out, but we've got to work now faster'n we ever worked on the *Santa Cruz*. Forget that head of yours, Tom. And you, Frank, maybe that twist 'the bends' left you with'll come in handy

stooping over to lash up hammocks. Lively now, Bill, break out the fore hold; all of you except Frank light those ingots aft, keeping below decks, and send 'em up on the port side of the superstructure through the messroom so's the deckhouse blocks off the view from the *Esmeralda*. Here's the key. Frank, you drag a dozen hammocks up on deck from the crew space, spread 'em in the port passage, and stand by to lash up those ingots. Mike, you help 'em get started, then finish getting up steam. Shake a leg now, all hands!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The little group melted away. Bill, Tom, Joe, and Mike clambered down the steep ladder, dropped into the lower deck passage, and ran forward under the forecastle. Bill unlocked the hatch; four pairs of hands seized the steel hatch cover over the hold, threw it back. Tom climbed swiftly down the vertical ladder into the fore hold. Behind a heavy thwartship bulkhead were the ingots. Tom unlocked the door, flung it open.

Row on row, in rough bars cast by the *conquistadores* of Pizarro from the rude ornaments seized from tortured Inca warriors; in dazzling sheets torn unceremoniously from the roof of the Temple of the Sun; in broken idols sacrilegiously stripped from Indian altars, lay the treasure of the *Santa Cruz*, a soft yellow glow diffusing in every direction in that room literally paved with precious gold!

For a moment Tom Williams stared through swollen eyes. Gold, four tons of it, millions of dollars worth! His legs shook, his bandaged forehead throbbed, a delirious urge swept him to plunge head foremost amongst those bars, to clutch them to his heart, to revel drunkenly amidst that golden hoard!

"Shake it up, Tom! Wot's eatin' you? Turn to an' start passin' 'em up!"

Above, framed in the little hatch, the bronzed face of the bosun's mate stared down on him. Tom flushed, made no reply. Muscles still quivering, he stooped over the nearest ingot and gripping firmly the fifty pound mass, absurdly small for such a weight; with an effort even for his massive shoulders, he tossed it through the open hatch to the deck above, where it landed with a dull clatter. Joe Hawkins seized it, swung it to his shoulder, and staggered away down the passage.

CHAPTER V

MESSAGE OF STEEL

THE narrow deck on the port side of the *Lapwing* was littered with lashed hammocks, eleven of them. Amidships, Ramsay, his back throbbing painfully as he stooped, seized ingots from the panting runners below, tossed them one by one in neat rows into the twelfth canvas sheet until it also was full. Then, with Frank's help, he rolled the stout canvas tightly, overlapped its sides, heaved mightily to lift it a scant inch off the deck, while Frank bending low, ran the hammock lashing through beneath, hauled taut each turn, and bound the ends. Fourteen bars, seven hundred pounds of gold in that hammock. The same or its equivalent, in all the others. Ramsay scanned them, almost incredulous. In spite of its tremendous weight, each one when finally lashed made a far thinner roll that the normal stowage of a hammock.

Tom Williams struggled up the ladder, sweat smearing his cheeks, and dropped a bar of gold at Ramsay's feet.

"That's the last one, cap'n; she's stripped clean below!"

Ramsay straightened up. Behind Tom, the others crowded panting out to the deck, dripping with perspiration, looking ready to collapse. But there was no time for rest. Ramsay looked at his watch and whistled.

"Forty minutes of that hour gone already! Quick, men; give Frank a hand stopping these hammocks to that mooring hawser at the rail while I see what's

doing on the *Esmeralda*!" He dashed forward, headed toward the bridge.

Bill looked mournfully at the lashed-up hammocks, at the bulwark, a yard above them.

"A block an' tackle an' a boom's wot we oughta have fer this job. But there ain't time to rig one. C'mon, boys, fer the last time!" The worn-out toilers gripped the nearest hammock, heaved it up on the wide teak rail alongside the six-inch mooring hawser, which had been stopped at intervals with marline along the top of the bulwark. With turn on turn of reeving line, they seized both ends and the middle of the canvas to the hawser; then, with a fathom of stray hawser in between, stopped on the next hammock, continued on until in a few minutes the gold-filled bags looked like a string of sausages, link on link.

Ramsay reached the bridge, trained his powerful binoculars to starboard. Sanchez had not exaggerated. An hour's grace was all he was going to get. In the wide field of his glasses, as plainly visible as if close aboard, was every evidence of feverish activity on the *Esmeralda*. From her port boat crane, the last boat, a thirty foot motor-sailer, was just being dropped into the water. Clustered round the cruiser's stern, already afloat, were all her other small craft—two whaleboats, a steam picket launch, a second motor-sailer. The whaleboats, jammed with men, were lying off a little, astern of the steamer. Close alongside the port quarter lay the motor-sailer, a stream of white-clad sailors flowing pell-mell down two sea-ladders into her, spreading out over the wide thwarts. On the quarterdeck, gesticulating officers, more seamen milled round the ladder heads. Hoarse cries drifted across the water, bayonets gleamed on deck and in the boats. A motor coughed faintly; the loaded motor-sailer shoved clear, her place beneath the sea-ladders was quickly taken by the other launch, freed now from the crane. The last company of boarders poured swiftly down the *Esmeralda's* side.

A long blast on the cruiser's whistle and the boats drifting astern started to move. Ramsay swung his glasses, scanned them. The steamer kicked ahead a few turns, flung a line astern; evidently she was going to tow the whaleboats until they were close aboard the *Lapwing*, then cast them loose to work alongside under oars.

Another blast of the whistle. All the boats were loaded now and clear of the ship. Ramsay looked at his watch. The hour was up; the boats were on their way.

For another moment Ramsay watched their progress. The crowded boats, gunwales low, struggling through a beam sea, were making heavy weather of it. It would take at least ten minutes for them to cover the distance. He would wait until he had them close aboard; short-handed himself, he needed every minute. Again he swept the little flotilla with his glasses, hastily estimating its strength. At least a hundred and fifty fighting men jammed in those boats. And he with only seven!

On they came, rolling heavily in the trough of the sea, laboring motors chugging, black smoke pouring from the brass stack of the picket boat, bayonets flashing in the sun. Ramsay's binoculars, sweeping down the line, came to rest on the picket launch, the flagship of the tiny squadron. And there he noted with alarm a boat gun pivoted on the bow of the launch, a one-pounder, with two men crouched behind it. He had not expected artillery; that was bad. That gun must not get too close to them. Rifle fire, inaccurate at best from tossing boats, would ricochet harmlessly from the *Lapwing's* steel sides, but those one-pounder shells could rip his bridge to pieces, queer everything. It was time to act.

He ran to the port wing of the flying bridge and looked over. The six-inch hawser was in place, draped over the

side, run forward outboard of the forecastle to the hawsepipe, and there lashed firmly to the anchor chain just below the bolster. And in wake of the deckhouse, it led along the teak rail, a fathom of slack between each pair of hammocks, which were fastened to it as he had ordered and held in place on the bulwark by marline stops at each end. The hawser itself was cut off just abaft the last hammock. All was ready. And stretched out in the passage, catching a fleeting moment's rest, were his panting men.

"Bill! Joe! On the fo'c's'le with you. Unshackle! The rest of you, on your feet now! Stand by to light that hawser over the side when Bill lets go!"

Ramsay ran to the voice tube and rang the fireroom.

"Below there, Mike! How's the steam?"

"Ready to pop, cap'n! I wuz just after cuttin' the fires to hold 'er down!"

"Shoot in the oil, Mike; let 'er blow! And then stand by the throttle. We'll be underway in less'n a minute!"

"Aye, aye, sor!"

Ramsay straightened up, looked over the bridge screen. On the forecastle, Bill and Joe crouched low over the port anchor cable, gripping the unshackling tools. On the steel plates at their feet was the hundred and twenty fathom shackle, slack on deck. A little forward, just inboard of the hawsepipe, the pelican hook of a chain stopper gripped the cable, taking the strain of the anchor.

Joe placed the point of a drift over the locking pin; a rap from Bill's sledge and it dropped out. A hard rap on each side to loosen it, then a husky swing with all Bill's strength—and the shackle pin shot out, rattled against the bulwark. The chain dropped apart, unshackled. Joe leaped toward the stopper, yanked the cotter pin there from the pelican hook, then hastily drew clear as Bill, sledge in hand, poised himself abreast the turnbuckle and glanced expectantly up to the bridge.

The boats were only a few hundred yards off now, fanning out in order to board him bow, stern, and amidships simultaneously. He caught a faint order, saw the breech of the one-pounder open, a shell slide home, the block shoot closed, the gun start to elevate. In the bows of the oncoming motor launches, he caught glimpses of swarthy faces behind rifle stocks, struggling to get elbow room to level their pieces; while behind them, others were slinging rifles to leave their hands free for boarding.

A bell rang. The engine room voice tube. Ramsay stooped over it.

"At the throttle now, sor; all—"

No time for the rest of the message—that was enough. Ramsay leaned over the bridge, roared out:

"Let go!"

BILL'S sledge fell. The pelican hook flew apart; the cable rattled out the hawsepipe. Bill leaped wildly in the air, clung a moment to the head of the anchor davit as the free end of the cable, sure annihilation if it struck him, thrashed out over the chain plates and disappeared overboard. Back aft, Tom, Frank, and Don Diego began to slash viciously at the marline stops. No need. The manila hawser along the side stretched taut with a jerk as the chain sank, broke the stops like threads; in rapid succession the hammocks shot off the rail, splashed overboard, vanished with startling suddenness. Ramsay gazed grimly at the foaming water. The gold for which they had sweated blood, which already had cost the lives of half the *Lapwing's* crew, was hurtling down through the sea to mingle in the ooze with the shattered hulk of the *Santa Cruz*.

But in a split second Ramsay's thoughts came back to the *Lapwing*, no longer held by her anchor but swinging slowly round to starboard. Those boats were only a ship's length off his beam. He gripped the engine telegraph, viciously jerked it to and fro, shoved it hard

down to "Full Ahead." Below he heard the clanging of the engine room gong; the pointer on the dial beneath his hand swung forward in answer to his signal. The *Lapwing* quivered, began to move. White water foamed up under the fantail, cascaded away in widening eddies. Ramsay seized the wheel, spun it hard left. He must get those boats astern, where their fire would be least dangerous to him. The ship started to swing, heeling sharply to starboard under the kick of a hard over rudder.

Wild cries of rage came from the boats, echoed across the seas, then a hoarse command in Spanish:

"Tira!"

Instinctively Ramsay let go the spokes, dropped to the deck, slid to the off side, away from the boats. A shell screamed overhead, whistled through the rigging, exploded somewhere off to port. A ragged volley from the rifles followed, continued ominously; bullets rattled against the *Lapwing's* sides like rain on a tin roof, whined over Ramsay as he lay, riddled the canvas wind screen around the wheel. Evidently the riflemen were concentrating on the bridge. On his stomach, Ramsay crawled up the slope to port, thrust his head out over the ladder and sang out.

"All hands, keep down and get below quick! Give Mike a hand there with the fires and the engine!"

The *Lapwing* was gathering speed, shaking violently as the engine raced under a full head of steam. Ramsay, with the rattle of musketry in his ears, flattened out on the deck, slowly crawled back amidships, lifted himself slightly on one elbow, and peered out through the holes in the riddled convas. The pinnacle on El Morro was looming up ahead.

The *Lapwing*, heeled hard a-starboard, had made a quarter turn. The boats were now astern; only the wings of the bridge were still completely exposed to rifle fire. The wheel was sheltered by the steel sides of the chart room abaft it. Ramsay seized the pedestal of the heavy brass steering stand, dragged himself erect, whirled the spokes frantically checking the swing to port. The little vessel came slowly erect, straightened out on her course west, gathered speed. A mooring buoy, gaily painted in red and yellow stripes, rose dead ahead. The stem struck it, the spar careened crazily off to starboard, drifted down the side.

And now a new noise burst out, drowning even the rapid fire of the rifles. The siren of the *Esmeralda* began to shriek, its shrill note rising to an almost unbearable pitch, wailing across the water; blending with it, deep, full-throated, came half a dozen hoarse blasts on her whistle. Immediately firing ceased.

Cautiously Ramsay left the wheel, hugged the corner of the charthouse, looked aft. Signal flags fluttered at the cruiser's yardarm. Recall for her boats. A dull rumble mingled with the moaning of the siren. The *Esmeralda* was heaving in her anchor, swinging out her boat cranes, preparing to pick up her boats and give chase. In his foaming wake, the overloaded motor launches, hopelessly outdistanced, were coming about and heading back for the *Esmeralda*. Only the picket launch, the whaleboats cast adrift from her now, was still in pursuit, tossing and pitching in the broken water from his racing propeller. But the *Lapwing* could surely outfoot her. And by the time the cruiser had stopped, hoisted in her boats, and settled down to pursuit in earnest, he would be miles ahead.

The wind was freshening. For the first time since that hectic morning began, Ramsay looked up and studied the weather. To the westward the sky was overcast; the horizon beyond El Morro was already invisible in the mist. Dark banks of clouds were forming, spreading rapidly, and threatening to blot out the sun. In an hour at most, a storm would strike them.

Ramsay's pulse quickened as he scanned the clouds. Perhaps, after all, he might not have to sink the *Lapwing!*

Given lead enough, he might in the low visibility shake off pursuit, escape completely, prepared, as soon as the baffled *Esmeralda* was safely back in Callao, to return, drag for his abandoned anchor there among his mooring buoys—and with luck, heave up the heavy manila hawser and the treasure in a few hours work without ever putting a man over the side in a diving rig! His heart lightened as the *Lapwing* pounded ahead toward the gathering storm. A break at last!

The voice tube bell. Ramsay crossed the bridge with one stride, answered. It was Reilly.

"I got the high pressure steam bypassed to both the I. P. an' the L. P. cylinders, sor. She's turnin' up a hun'erd an' twenty revolutions, sixteen knots. Shure an' I'll hold 'er there, cap'n, till the ile gives out, if me cylinders don't bust first!"

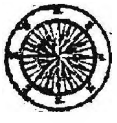
Ramsay dropped the cover, seized the wheel, headed a little more to starboard so as barely to clear the north point of El Morro. Sixteen knots! Two over their designed speed. So Reilly was bypassing some live steam to the intermediate and the low pressure cylinders in order to increase the pressure on them. Bad for the oil consumption, tough on the engine balance—but good for speed in an emergency! A final swing of the spokes, heading just to clear El Morro on the port hand as speedily as possible and get that island between him and the *Esmeralda's* guns, and he left the wheel, looked eagerly aft.

The *Lapwing* was gaining on the launch with every turn of her screw. Half a mile astern already, it must soon give up the race and head back for the *Esmeralda*. He licked his dry lips, watched Sanchez gesticulating to his coxswain, urging more speed. Then, fascinated, he saw the muzzle of that long one-pounder on the steamer's bow elevate, pause, steady a moment, flash. Ramsay dashed for the shelter of the chart-room. Too late. The shell tore through the *Lapwing's* thin stack, hit the wheel, exploded on the bridge. Ramsay staggered, went suddenly gray; masked in a cloud of yellow smoke and flame, he crumpled slowly. His huge frame sprawled full length amidst the wreckage of the steering stand, clawed at the shattered spokes, then lay still.

And the *Lapwing*, helm and helmsman gone, veered slowly to port into the trough of the seas, drove full speed toward the surf breaking dead ahead on the rocks of El Morro!

CHAPTER VI

DEATH'S QUARRY



DON DIEGO ARENDA, ex captain in the Peruvian Navy, late naval attaché in the Peruvian Embassy at Washington, steadied the greasy spout of an oil can in his right hand, aimed it at the copper funnel on the flying connecting rod before him.

Machinery was not his forte; he had been always on deck duty when not a diplomat. But now, he was clinging to the column of an old reciprocating engine with cranks spinning madly, connecting rods whirling to and fro, piston rods churning wildly up and down, eccentrics dancing crazily before his eyes, and all needing oil as never before. And his very life depended on keeping them well oiled.

Ordinarily oiling was a simple job—a few quarts of oil poured in, filling to the proper level the lubricators on the grating above, and the task was done. The wicks and gravity could be depended on to feed the oil, drop by drop, to the various bearings. But not now. That pounding engine, grossly overloaded and overspeeded, was prodigally flinging the precious oil off the crossheads, out the crank pins, at the very time when lubrication was imperative if spinning journals were not to overheat, wipe out the babbitt metal and seize solidly.

Arenda timed himself, finally caught the funnel in the fleeting instant at the top of a stroke when for a fraction of a second it came to rest, and shot it full of oil. With a gasp of relief, he jerked dizzily backward on the grating, thankful he had not lost his balance and plunged in among that mass of flying steel. That was the high pressure rod he had just oiled, the last one. A few minute's peace now, before he had to start at the after end of the grating, face once more that terrifying triple-expansion engine, work his way forward again.

It was hot. The gratings fairly sizzled with the heat radiated from the laboring engine; live steam, hissing past the leaky piston rod glands at every revolution, made the air unbearably humid. Arenda, slight in build, unused to hard physical exertion, leaned backward against the dripping shell of the main condenser, panting heavily. Cool air! He must get a breath, or he could never make his next round without collapse.

At the far end of the grating was the ladder leading to the after crew space, which was wide open to the heavens since the explosion in the fantail. Arenda caught a glimpse of sky, cool and inviting. There was time enough before his next round with the oil. He gripped the oil can, walked cautiously aft, scrambled up the steep rungs out of the engine room into the crew compartment; there, bathed in sweat, he dropped the oil can, turned his tired eyes skyward, luxuriated in the fresh sea air sweeping the open room.

But only for a moment. Below, in the blistering heat, his shipmates, as unaccustomed as he to such work, were laboring with the fires, struggling with unfamiliar machinery in a desperate attempt to outwit their common enemy. He must go back.

Stooping, he picked up the oil can, and retraced his steps, when a thought struck him. Beyond that after bulkhead, crowded into the narrow flat beneath the fantail, was the steering engine, far from the other auxiliaries. That engine, part of the deck machinery, he understood better. A little oil there, on the crossheads, on the rudder yoke pins, would not be amiss. He was close; it would take hardly any time. And when had that steering engine last been oiled? *Quién sabe?* Don Diego turned hastily aft, picked his way over the tangle of mattresses, squeezed through the tiny manhole, hardly large enough to be classed as a door, into the steering engine room.

The deck beneath his feet vibrated from the whirling propeller, quivered uneasily as the flat counter smacked down in the waves. There was little space between the tapering sides of the ship and that wide engine. He must be careful; when the rudder head moved he must not be caught in between those inexorable steel arms, or he would be mashed into jelly. Arenda reflected. On a vessel steaming in a seaway, the rudder moved periodically for brief intervals as the helmsman met the yaws. At any second now, the silent engine there before him would spring to life. He would wait till the next turn of the rudder; after that he could safely count on sufficient time to shoot in some oil, get clear.

He waited. Nothing happened. Anxious to get back to the main engine, the slow seconds seemed minutes to Don Diego, as he waited irritably for the clatter of the engine. And then it came to him that he had not heard that engine move, even while he had been cooling off in the next compartment. Surely the stubby *Lapwing*, notoriously given to yawing under the slightest provocation, had not held her true course that long without attention! Was something wrong with Ramsay, alone there on the bridge?

Arenda turned to the voice tube alongside the trick wheel on the steering engine, pressed the button marked "Bridge," listened. No reply. Again he pressed, heard the tinkling of the bell on the bridge, but still no answer.

Frightened, he cast aside his oil can, crawled through the bulkhead, clambered up the nearest ladder to the fantail, ran to the side, looked forward. *Sangre de Cristo!* His heart almost stopped beating.

Rising dead ahead, not half a dozen ship lengths off, was El Morro! Breakers roared at its foot, dashed high in clouds of spray against its rugged face; already the *Lapwing* was beginning to pitch crazily among the swells rushing shoreward with express train speed. And from the bridge, where the war-colored canvas windscreen hung in tatters, a yellow cloud of smoke curled lazily upward!

IN ONE wild jump, disregarding ladders, Don Diego leaped down through the jagged opening in the deck, dived headlong through the open manhole into the steering room, slid along the oily deck, brought up with a bump against the engine. Scrambling erect, he flung himself at the series of cranks and rods overhead, yanked out a pin, shoved it back in the next hole. The bridge wheel now was disconnected, the trick wheel on the engine itself coupled up.

Feverishly he spun the little trick wheel, hard right until it stopped. The steering engine beyond him started to race, the rudder stock groaned as it swung over; under so much helm suddenly applied, the deck took a terrific list to port, as if the speeding ship were about to capsize. But neglecting all this, Don Diego punched the engine room bell, screamed out:

"Full astern! *Por Dios*, full astern, *prontissimo!*"

The straining screw beneath his feet faltered, stopped; then, after what seemed an age, started in reverse, gathered speed. The fantail shook dangerously. Between the heavy list, the rattle of the steering engine, the quivering of shell plates as the propeller jerked astern, the violent pitching amongst the breakers, it seemed at last as if the damaged stern would break from the hull.

And then—*crash!*

They had struck! The listed ship careened wildly from port to starboard. Had he been too late?

Through the deadlight in the port side, Arenda saw a cliff, so close he might almost touch it, saw foaming breakers curling alongside; then the light buried itself in broken water, cut off his view.

A moment later the crazy rolling ceased and the ship slowly righted itself. The engine stopped dead. With no outlet for the steam, the safety valves lifted immediately. An unearthly screeching ensued. It was too much. Arenda abandoned the steering room, fled to the deck; but once in the clear again, his nerve came back and he gave fervent thanks as he surveyed the scene. As she had swung beneath the cliff, the *Lapwing* had scraped the rocks, glanced off—but now she was clear, pointed a little off shore; still under her previous momentum, she was moving farther out into deep water ever moment. And piling up breathlessly from the engine room hatch came Bill and Joe.

"Wot struck us, a six-inch shell?" cried Bill before he had half cleared the hatch.

"Any water coming in?" countered Arenda fearfully.

"Not in the engine 'r the fireroom, anyway," answered Joe. "Mike an' Tom 'r still below there, an' it's dry's my—" He caught sight of the beetling cliff, hardly a ship length away, stopped, trembled as he eyed it. "Fer God's sake, did we hit that?"

"Not quite, *amigo mío*." Arenda glanced off the quarter. The picket launch, a mile astern, evidently noting their insane movements, was again heading for them. "On our bridge, something ees wrong. We must steer from aft. Both of you into the steering room. Joe, you steer with the trick wheel till we round this *isla*, then head west to sea. Bill, you con the ship for him through the

deadlights. Somewhere forward, we make water from that crash and soon we may sink, but eet must be at least in deep water, not here." He paused, worn from making himself heard above the roaring of the steam escaping from the safety valves. "Bill you have a voice *como un* foghorn! Order Mike to go ahead! That noise, she drives me wild!"

"O.K." Bill leaned over the side, looked forward. All clear there, no rocks in sight. He thrust his head down the engine room hatch, bellowed:

"Below there, Mike! Full ahead again!"

In spite of the roaring of the pop valves, Mike got it; almost immediately the engine started to throb and the ship once more drove ahead. Joe, running aft to man the trick wheel, vanished below. Bill followed, halting a moment to scan more closely the reefs off the port quarter, which he must clear in rounding the headland.

Arenda, left alone, cast a fleeting glance to starboard. The *Esmeralda,* pointed for them now, had both her cranes swung out, picking up her motor boats, men and all; while simultaneously, farther aft on her, the whaleboats were being hooked on beneath the davits. And the baffled picket launch, seeing the *Lapwing* was under way once more, was turning away at last to rejoin the cruiser. For the moment they were unpursued.

But what had happened to Ramsay?

DON DIEGO ran for the bridge, in growing despair caught signs of disaster multiplying round him as he tremblingly mounted the ladder: the wind screen gone; the starboard pelorus, hurled from the gimbals, hanging grotesquely from its bent stand; a haze of yellow fumes from picric acid clinging to the bridge, burning his nostrils. Once on the upper deck, his worst fears were confirmed. Before him, face down in the wreckage of steering wheel and binnacle, bathed in blood, his scorched shirt still smouldering, lay Ramsay.

With a sob, Arenda ripped away the burning linen, knelt beside him. Heaving with all his strength at the silent form, he rolled the limp body of his friend face up. Dead? Don Diego bent low, ear against the naked torso, listened. *Gracias a Dios!* Still a faint murmur to the heart!

Rapidly his dark eyes swept Ramsay's figure, searching out the wounds. They were plainly visible. An ugly cut across the scalp, with blood slowly oozing through the matted hair where a splinter of the bursting shell had struck; a deep gash in the left arm, bleeding freely; a broad welt across the chest, made by a flying fragment of the wheel. And numerous burns, all with that startling yellow color from the picric base powder.

Arenda pulled off his shirt, but after one look tossed it aside. That sweat-soaked rag, sure breeder of infection, was worse than nothing as a bandage on an open wound. But he must quickly have something to bind up that arm, or Ramsay would bleed to death. What else? His tired eyes swept the bridge. In a heap, collapsed beside the chart-room, was the rack of signal flags. He reached over, seized the letter S, mostly white, and ripped it apart. That fine wool, impregnated with salt sea air, would do much better. With agile fingers he pressed the torn flesh together, swiftly bound up Ramsay's bleeding arm. The head wound, the bruises? For the present, he could do nothing for them. He gripped the sagging shoulders, dragged Ramsay clear of the wreckage, propped him gently against the chart-room bulkhead, and rose painfully. He must carry on. The command of the *Lapwing* now was his.

Astern was El Morro. They had rounded the northern cape of the island; in the quieter water in its lee, the *Lapwing* was racing westward. For the moment, the *Esmeralda* was lost to sight,

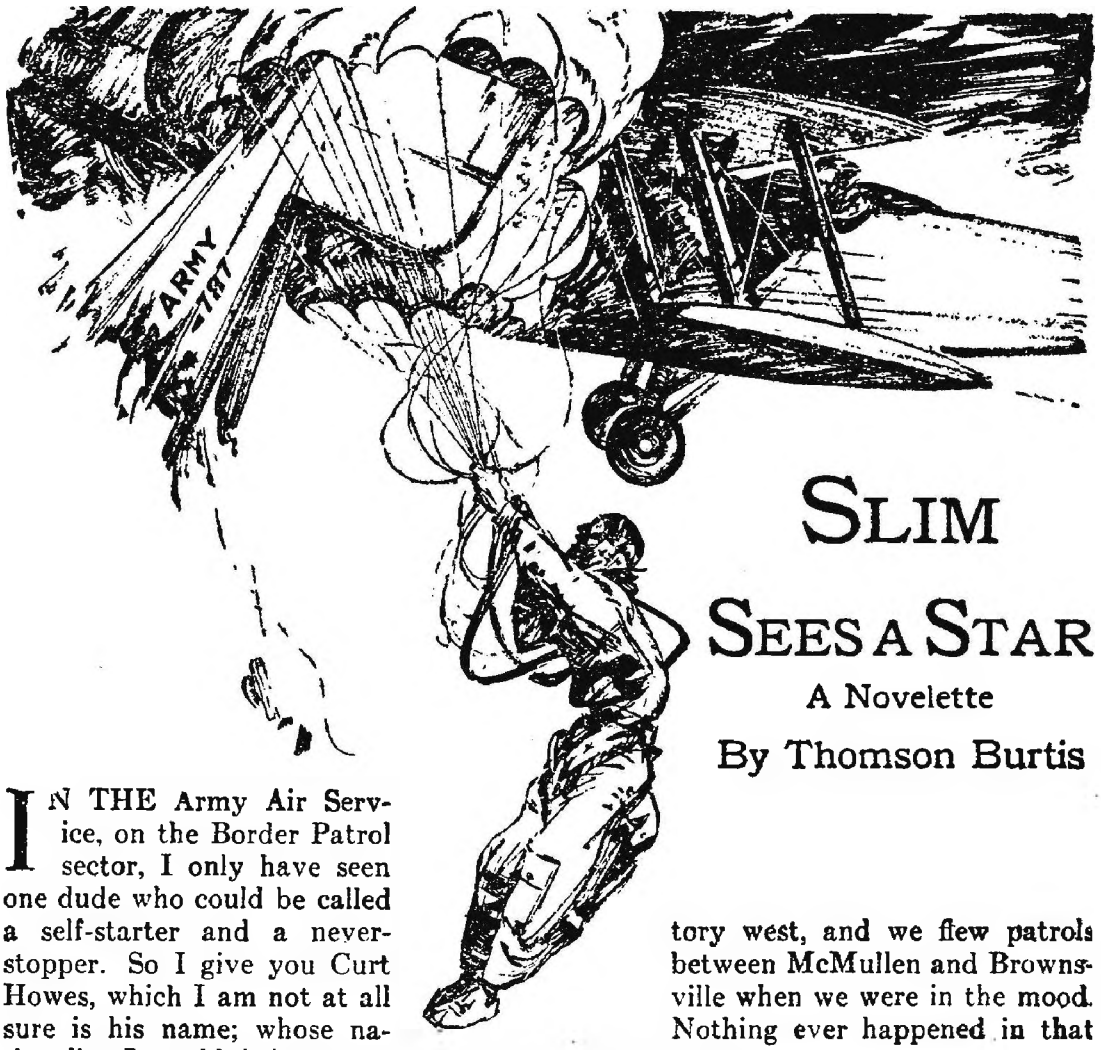
hidden by the pinnacle. Ahead, dark clouds lowered. Already a heavy rain squall was blotting out the distant horizon. If only he could get the *Lapwing* there before shells from the *Esmeralda* herself began dropping on them, they might escape.

But no, it would never be! His eyes, coming back to the *Lapwing*, saw with dismay that they were slowly settling by the head. Already the little vessel had a perceptible trim, her sluggish bow was plunging heavily into the waves, not lifting easily to them. The rocks off El Morro had ripped open the fore hold; they must be making water steadily. And as the minutes dragged slowly by, Arenda watched the forecastle settle and the draft increase; the waterlogged *Lapwing* was appreciably slowing down.

A roar, louder than any he had yet heard, a whining overhead, a splash—and a hundred yards ahead a huge column of water rose into the air. A six-inch shell bounced from the spray at its base and ricocheted half a dozen times across the waves, tumbling, spinning as it skipped away. A dud, fired as a warning to stop. Arenda looked aft. The *Esmeralda* had just rounded the island and was in hot pursuit. With practised eyes, he measured their lead. Six thousand yards—three miles, at least. Another flash astern; a second shell screamed by, burst in a volcano of flame a few lengths ahead. No more practise shells, the *Esmeralda* had opened now with TNT. In rapid succession, shells whistled by, with deafening roars detonated just ahead.

Arenda shrank back, waiting for the projectile that would crash down through the *Lapwing's* thin decks, tear them to pieces. But still no hits. Every burst was well ahead of them. What was the matter with the gunners? Gradually it dawned on Arenda. The *Esmeralda* was there to seize the treasure; with her heavy guns, she dared not risk a direct hit that might sink her and the gold she carried! The object was to capture the ship, not to sink her!

(To be continued)



SLIM SEES A STAR

A Novelette

By Thomson Burtis

IN THE Army Air Service, on the Border Patrol sector, I only have seen one dude who could be called a self-starter and a never-stopper. So I give you Curt Howes, which I am not at all sure is his name; whose nationality I wouldn't bet on; whose antecedents and ancestry I know less than nothing of; a guy who knew what book it was in and what page it was on, no matter what the proposition; a four-flusher who always filled with the fifth card when the chips were down.

He fell into my life via the McMullen flight of the Border Patrol which the Army Air Service ran along the Texas border back in the twenties. I, being Slim Evans, now a practicing captain and in those days a first lieutenant, was in temporary command of a skeleton squadron. Captain Kennard and Tex MacDowell and a couple of other boys, together with half the enlisted men, were elsewhere on temporary duty, the border being quiet, so I ran a sleepy outfit which barely had the strength to blow a smoke ring. The Marfa flight covered our territory west, and we flew patrols between McMullen and Brownsville when we were in the mood. Nothing ever happened in that sector anyway.

So exactly four officers and gentlemen, aided and abetted by Sheriff Trowbridge of McMullen, were sitting around the recreation room just after dark, taking an occasional drink and listening to the old sheriff honk and harrumph and snort about how quick the old Texas Rangers would have rounded up Kid Underwood, latest of the Babyface, Prettyboy, Sweetheart-of-Sigma-Chi bankrobbers.

This particular thirty-year-old cutey had developed a new technique. When he knocked off a bank, he shot everybody important first. A pathological case, and a dirty guy, as the sheriff remarked, because he was really smart. Smart enough to be in hiding in Mexico, in fact.

We were listening to the sheriff wander on about the old days and this and that when there came a knock at the

door. I yelled, "Come in!" What came in resulted first in complete cessation of what little motion there had been, and then a sort of tingling feeling chasing its tail up and down my spine.

A human scarecrow, almost as tall as I am, which is six feet six, walked through the door. His overalls were caked with mud, his shirt in tatters, his face indistinguishable beneath a mask of blood and dirt. His clothes flapped around a frame that seemed wasted away to bone, and to top the nightmare he wore, below a hat which shadowed his face, a pair of dark sunglasses.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he croaked, "I wonder whether I could trouble you for a little something to eat and drink?"

He acted as though he had just stepped into a drawing room in full evening dress. Sleepy Spears was the first one to find his tongue and he got hold of the wrong words.

"If you'll go around to the messhall—" he started.

The creepy gent cut in: "I hope I haven't fallen so low as to be unwelcome among the officers—"

And with that he swayed.

As I jumped forward he tried to draw himself up, and mumbled:

"Excuse me. Silly of me."

I was in time to catch him as he fainted.

I carried him to the couch and Jimmy Jennings ran for Doc Searles, the flight surgeon, and everybody was babbling when suddenly all tongues ceased firing at once.

His hat fell off, and revealed the nastiest mass of clotted blood you ever turned your head away from. And when I ripped open his shirt, we saw that his torso had been wrapped in towels. He was encased in a corset, so to speak, stiffened with blood and dirt.

And that wasn't all. As the glasses fell off and I commenced to get a rough relief map of his features, I took three gulps and a drink of straight gin.

"I know this guy!' I stated, just as little old Doc Searles came pattering in.

He tut-tutted and cluck-clucked and tch-tched, and then had the unconscious stranger carried to the hospital tent for a complete going over.

A FEW weeks before I'd flown over to a wild, oil boom town in East Texas to spend the weekend. I am a man of low tastes. I am a human flagpole topped by a face, the outstanding feature of which is the Evans beak. An exploration party following this proboscis from source to mouth would cover many a hill and dale in the process, and end up on a promontory from which they could survey the surrounding terrain for miles around. The face is just a face by courtesy, but I value it as a present from my father and mother.

Anyway, I often like to hit an oil town, and sizzle in the raw, steaming life of the place. I like to dance with the dancehall girls, to drink straight liquor over a dozen crowded bars, to smell petroleum on the hoof and watch some greasy guy shoot five grand, and to bet a few pennies myself that he's wrong.

So I was in a barroom. Up at the end of the bar a tall, handsome gent with blond hair which was turning gray was singing damn good harmony with another fellow. After each selection the tall chap would turn with a sunny smile and announce proudly:

"Just like an organ!"

He was like a kid having a swell time He was built like a composite of the All-America fullbacks of all time, with a head that seemed a little too small for his body. His features were regular, but not too strong: short, curved nose, square chin, and eyes that were not too large but had a sort of nonsensical glint in 'em. His mouth, however, meant business.

Noticing my appreciation of their duet on "I Want a Girl" the big fellow en-

quired with a Chesterfieldian bow whether I happened to have a bass note or two concealed on my person. Being a trifle cockeyed, I stated that singing bass was practically my career. So it became a threesome, he bought a drink, and the other fellow bought one, and I bought one, and after each selection the big fellow announced:

"Just like an organ!"

Then it developed that they were broke. I didn't mind being promoted, and did all the buying from then on, because I was enjoying myself. I was deeply impressed by the fact that neither of them was at all embarrassed —and yet they didn't seem like professional spongers. The second man—obviously the two were close friends—was a chunky, broadfaced, drawling Texan. He looked and acted like an hombre who could take care of himself under all conditions. But he was completely under the domination of the big fellow—by choice, apparently.

At the sixth or eighth oasis we had favored with our selections and our patronage, it was suggested by the big fellow that we commercialize on our talents. I wasn't in uniform, although I wore khaki breeches and field boots. So we showed up at the next place as blind men with hats in our hands, and before we knew it we had collected five bucks or so.

Then the big fellow stated that he and his partner might make some expense money in a small poker game. They slid into a dollar limit game in a small time gambling house, and before you could say "Ante" they had run it up to thirty some odd, by the slickest bluffing I've ever seen. They entered the game singly, and were not known to be together.

Were they crooked? I couldn't swear that they weren't, but I don't think so. They did a lot of cross-raising to force everybody else out of pots, however, as though there was a species of mental telepathy going on.

The big fellow then proceeded to spend that thirty bucks with a generous, even a princely hand.

Well, we all went to sleep on the sand in the mesquite, and when I woke up they were gone, and I didn't have a nickel. I realized I didn't even know their names. Texas had called the big fellow, Puz, and Puz had called the Texan, Tex. Nor had they asked me anything about myself.

And the big fellow was the horribly wounded skeleton now in our hospital tent, and about whom Doc Searles pattered in to report.

"In addition to being beaten severely around the head, he was tortured," the upset little medico said jerkily. "There can be no doubt about it. It looks as though some one had taken a knife and sliced off pieces of flesh from his back. He has two broken ribs and other evidences of a terrible beating. It is horrible —horrible!"

"And he's lost at least thirty pounds in the last month, and his hair has turned completely gray," I filled in. "Will he pull through?"

"If the skull is not fractured—yes," Searles said. "He seems to have remarkable vitality, and to be a remarkable character. When he came to, he asked me whether one could buy Russian cigarettes in McMullen—and he was not delirious."

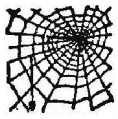
The whole atmosphere had changed. It seemed to be snapping and crackling with tense menace. It was as though we all felt that this was the start of something. And the sheriff, his gray mustachios waving in the breeze, clumped off to question the man who'd gone through so much.

He was immediately thrown back into our midst, for a loss.

"Won't say a word," he growled. "Except that it happened over the border —and he doesn't want to talk about it. But whether he likes it or not, that

caballero is going to be fingerprinted, just in case."

Which was done the next day, while he was in sort of a coma, and at the end of a week, the word came back from Washington that the fingerprints meant nothing at all to the Department of Justice. The sheriff, for lack of anything else to do, started trying to backtrack on "Puz's" trail from Golaya, this oil town where I'd met him, but there was no trail. People had seen him around Golaya for a day or two, that was all. Whence he came or whither he proceeded were mysteries—mysteries which our guest was completely unwilling to clear up.



CONSEQUENTLY I was delegated, on the first day the Doc would permit a visit from anybody but the law, to see whether I could dredge up any dope on a guy who had been tortured, supposedly by outlaws of determined and merciless calibre. Hombres like that are matters of legitimate interest to such as Sheriff Trowbridge and even, when the wind is in the east, to the Border Patrol.

The officers of the Patrol lived in luxurious tents about ten feet square, to which a kindly Uncle Sam had added floors of real board. In one of these lay the bandaged Howes. Long cross examination by the sheriff had elicited the startling information that his name was Curt Howes.

His head was helmeted in bandages, and he was sealing a letter as I made my entrance and waved the hospital-orderly nurse outside. His face was fuller, and that slow, rare smile of his adorned it as he said:

"Greetings. I still maintain you're sour on that last note of 'Rollicking Bill the Sailor.'"

"Did you come here to tell me that?" I enquired.

"Came because it was an army post, but your presence thereon was merely a surprising and additional pleasure," he stated.

I couldn't tell whether this outburst of speech was half-kidding, or the way he usually talked.

Having established the fact that his health was improving and that it hurt him to move and that the weather was hot enough to raise a blister on a chunk of ice, I asked casually:

"Where's your pal, Tex?"

"Oh, around and about somewhere," he said, addressing the envelope of his letter.

"I thought you two were inseparable."

"We work together, but often separately," he stated.

He had a habit of saying everything in a manner which made it a mystery whether he was serious or not. His face was practically without lines of any sort—character, dissipation, age, or weather. His eyes, however, were like a pair of crystal balls in which you could see about anything your imagination happened to be interested in. Sometimes they were gray and sometimes green and sometimes blue, together with combinations thereof, with little brown flecks in them all the time.

"I noticed that separately-together stuff in that card game," I said.

"Often helps," he said with aplomb.

"Listen, Howes," I said, deciding to crack the line, "Something's happened to you that's pretty creepy and gives rise to a lot of speculation. We're willing and able to do something about it, maybe. What's the lay—and why not let us smack the hyenas that carved you up?"

He smiled, as though we were discussing lending him a necktie.

"There's nothing you can do. It's strictly my affair,' he said, lighting a cigarette. "Futhermore, any intrusion on anybody's part would undoubtedly cost me a good deal of money and trouble, and very probably a valuable life or two. I have the intention, Lieutenant, of handling the matter in my own way."

His speech was curious. He might have been English, Canadian or American. He had no particular accent or lingo. He just talked precisely, in a manner that might have been phonily stilted, and yet which you felt might have been the way he had been brought up to talk. In short, his pearls of wisdom were enclosed in a case which was as completely unrevealing as his face and his fingerprints.

"Well, it's your business," I said.

"Perspicacious fellow!" he smiled.

The fact of the matter is that I, like the sheriff and Doc Searles, had been bounced off this guy's mental and physical armor with a severe dent in my own conceit, and no scratch on him.

"Anything I can do?" I enquired as I unwound to leave.

"You being the only man I ever drank with, outside of Tex, who didn't feel called on at some point in the evening to tell who he was, and how good he had been, and how important he would be," said Mr. Howes, with that enigmatic smile, "there is."

I didn't know whether to snort at him for a patronizing windbag, or to thank him for the privilege of dusting off the dandruff of the King.

"If you'd mail this letter for me, and not tell anybody at all about it, it would be a great favor," he told me.

He handed it to me. It was addressed to the Postmaster of San Antonio.

"Okay."

"Thanks. And say, if the market reports are favorable, and there are any good Russian cigarettes in McMullen, a bale of them would ease my bed of pain."

"We'll see what we can do," I promised, and sallied forth into the blinding Texas sun to do as I was bid.

I formed the habit of dropping in several times a day to say hello. He was always in good humor, never talked about anything but superficialities, and never mentioned himself, his past, his operation, or anything else more personal than the temperature.

Then one day, a week later as the crow flies, a Kelly Field Martin landed on the pockethandkerchief of hard-packed sand we call an airdrome. Forth from the back cockpit stepped one Mr. Arther Young who craved speech with Mr. Curt Howes. Forth from the pilot's seat stepped Lieutenant Brad Haviland. While Young interviewed the Sphinx, I took a shot at Haviland.

With little or no success. Everything that remotely concerned Curt Howes, it appeared led up a blind alley. All Haviland knew was that he'd been ordered to fly this stocky mousy-looking civilian to McMullen and back, or anywhere else Young took a notion to percolate to.

This gentleman emerged from Howes' tent in about a half hour, and made a telephone call to McMullen from my telephone, after asking me to vacate the premises. Then, without any ado, he and Brad started the return trip to Kelly.

By this time my curiosity was out of control, and I went detectiving with all the sly, slinky finesse of a police car on a riot call. The net results of my investigations were that orders to fly Young down to our bailiwick had emanated from Corps Headquarters at Fort Sam Houston; that these orders had originated with the Commanding General himself; that the Commanding General held the quaint notion that his orders were his own exclusive business and nobody's else.

So that was that. And our completely recovered guest showed no inclination nor intention of leaving our fair sinkhole of sun and sand. He just moved in, uninvited but not exactly unwanted. He didn't have so much as a counterfeit *copeck*, and no clothes except some coveralls he'd picked up. He refused to borrow a dollar, and would accept nothing more than food, shelter, drinks, and an occasional cigarette. He would not accept a full package. He remarked, just once, that he expected a remittance

shortly, but when he said the word remittance it was with a sardonic smile.

One thing I noticed. While he showed no emotion, and seemed to be utterly content without any more varied social life than is led by an abandoned oyster, there never was any trace of that divinely nonsensical *caballero* who had remarked with pleased unction "Just like an organ." He was taking daily hurts to his pride with his chin up, but he wasn't enjoying it.

From his attitude, in fact, you'd have thought that he felt his presence was an honor to our humble hole, except for one thing. He seemed to be trying, in an inconspicuous way, to pay for his board by making himself useful. He lent a hand to mechanics, men policing the post, and even the cooks—and he was good at whatever he turned to. He'd dish up an occasional curry or goulash or spaghetti-and-meatball dish that would make a mummy's mouth water. In that way he had no false pride.

And he was never boresome. We gradually learned that he was a one-man circus who could play the piano in German or French; sing every ribald song ever written and some I believe he'd written himself; and start drinking in the morning to keep my hangover company and end up at night helping Jimmy Jennings drown his sorrows without ever getting drunk or failing in his flow of apropos anecdotes or cynical comment.

He was just there. No apologies, but he was there. And he practically Il Duced the diggings. We got to feel so guilty about going to town and leaving him alone that we didn't go. Instead we stayed and played bridge with a shark who could have won five bucks a night at half a cent a point—but wouldn't play for money because he wouldn't borrow any.

IT WAS at this stage in the game that I found myself unable to postpone any longer the job which I'd had to do for a week or more. That was to test a DeHaviland into whose aged life a new Liberty motor had come.

Jimmy Jennings and Sleepy Spears were on patrol, and Larry Hickman was asleep, and Howes nowhere in sight, so there was nothing else to do anyway. Consequently I folded myself into the two-seated bomber, took off, and prowled up to ten thousand feet to cool off.

There I roosted like a pelican too bored to look for fish. I did monkey with the motor a little, dived it and throttled it and flew it at all speeds including the Scandinavian, the while I glued a jaundiced eye on the oil gage and the temperature and whatnot. All seemed satisfactory, except that the oil pressure was a little low. Then I settled down to just set.

Down below was the post. It was just a tiny field, with corrugated hangars on the east and west sides, and the row of administration buildings and living quarters on the south boundary. It was like a gas station in the middle of a limitless sea of chaparral. Six miles south, the Rio Grande, four miles east, the town of McMullen, and everywhere else, mesquite. Its one saving grace—frequent and assorted action—seemed to have been lost.

Then I peered down, and perceived a little speck out in back of the officer's showers which I knew was Curt Howes the mysterious vagabond. He had the habit of stretching himself in the sun every afternoon, and was growing a tan which, in contrast to his gray hair, finished the job of making the towering stranger about as startlingly impressive a man as you ever looked at.

I was wondering sleepily about the visit of Young, the reasons for Howes' absolute refusal to tell anything about himself, and such like, when my day dreams turned into a nightmare.

What happened was that a connecting rod in the four hundred horsepower Liberty broke, but I didn't know it then. That motor just seemed to blow up.

There was clanging steel and metallic screaming as each one of the twelve cylinders started leading its own individual life. Then the propeller disintegrated with a loud report, and the fuselage started shimmying as though made of jelly.

And as I turned off the ignition the windshield shattered, and the piece of propellor which had done the deed completed its job by knocking me dizzy.

I was only half conscious as I dragged myself to my feet, groped for the ripcord ring of the parachute, and sort of fainted over the side.

I don't remember pulling the ripcord, but I not only did, but I did it too soon. My body hit something with a rib-cracking thud, and then the ribs got another dose as I was jerked up short—a funny kind of a jerk, different from the feel of your 'chute opening.

I give you my word that for the moment I didn't know whether I was having a dream, or going through an actual experience. I did know that my 'chute had wrapped itself around the tail surfaces, and that I was swinging helplessly below the empennage.

It was my ribs that made me realize that I wasn't going to wake up in bed. In fact, I was probably going to sleep forever. I literally fought myself into a sort of hazy consciousness, and stupidly surveyed the carnage.

Most of the motor had fallen out of the front end of the ship. This, plus my weight on the tail, was causing us to fall tail-down. No sooner did I realize that than the ship above me fell off on a wing. For a second I thought one of the wings was going to cut me in two. Then I was jerked to one side, and the pain of it brought me back to life.

A moment later, and my weight had dragged the nose way up in the air again. Then the ship fell off to one side once more, and again came that sickening jerk.

I was in a game of snap-the-whip with St. Peter as the anchor man.

I tried to drag myself up the shroudlines. Perhaps I might disengage the silk umbrella from the tail surfaces. But I didn't have the strength of an anemic flea. Besides, if the force of those jerks didn't tear it loose, I'd have had no chance to unsnarl it in the few thousand feet remaining between me and a self-dug grave. So there I hung—the human tail of an aerial monster threshing around in its last agony.

Then out of the clear sky, I was looking at another DeHaviland. Hickman must have awakened, and taken the air, but what could he do?

Somehow, though, a very faint glimmer of hope glimmed within me. I roused myself enough to grasp the shroudlines in an endeavor to cushion those sickening jerks. I got a sort of spiritual second wind which enabled me to watch what was going on as though the whole grisly episode was happening to two other people.

Hickman was very close, and his ship was like a dog darting in and out at a fighting bear. Twice I thought the outlaw ship above me would crash into him, but he dodged away. And what flying! A ton and a half of ship, with a speed of more than a hundred and twenty miles an hour, isn't the most delicate thing in the world to handle.

He was up to something.

There came a moment when I was hanging perpendicularly beneath the remnants of my ship. The other D.H. came roaring in. It was like an attack.

My ship fell off to the right. The wheels of Hickman's ship were only a few feet above my head as I watched its propellor bite right through the fuselage, a little ahead of the tail surfaces.

I will never live to see such another moment. The noise of the splintering fuselage, plus that of the shattered propeller, were like the crack of doom. My weight dragged the whole tail assembly loose. I started falling like a rock, and for a moment I dared not look up. A

frazzled 'chute, cut and slashed by that prop, wouldn't even slow my fall.

But it did. The rudder fell and hit me on the head, and I looked up. With wreckage stuck in the shroudlines and partially snarling them so that the 'chute couldn't open fully, I had nevertheless the sweetest looking silk umbrella bellying over my head that ever a man saw. I was falling fast, but there was no reason for me to die. Broken bones, of course, were a certainty, but right then crutches were more precious to me than a Cadillac would have been an hour before.

Then I looked down, two thousand feet down, and what I saw made me go limp with relief. The ambulance was rocketing over hill and dale toward the spot, about a quarter of a mile from the field, where I would hit if a sudden breeze didn't blow me off course. Those boys could save me if they got there first.

My late lamented ship crashed with gusto, a few hundred feet from the speeding bonewagon. Then the second ship, floating down like a ghost with its dead motor, made a circle around me.

I started to wave to Larry, but I suffered a sudden stroke of paralysis. I looked three times at the huge, naked, brown torso, grimy with oil, which loomed in the other ship. He saluted gaily.

Curt Howes was the pilot who'd saved my life.

It was too much for my feeble intellect, and my attention was being invited to the ground by Mr. Howes. But I'll never forget that picture of him—without helmet or goggles, his white hair waving in the breeze above a masklike face, and as calm as Mt. Everest.

Down on the ground half a dozen men had left the ambulance, and were scurrying like ants for the vicinity with which I would collide. They had a blanket with them, and they won the race by three lengths. With every muscle relaxed, I smacked that blanket so hard that it was torn from their hands, and I made a dent in the ground and a delightful state of languor in myself.

In fact, I couldn't move very well for almost five minutes, but my mind was curiously clear. The instinctive feeling I had been conscious of when Howes came to the flight—that destiny would somehow tangle us up together—reasserted itself with fatalistic force. It was as though there was nothing that I could do about it. He carried too many guns.

And strange as it may sound, cynical as it may be, and smack as it may of a heel of the old school, my gratitude was temporarily submerged in the thought:

"He's got me where he wants me now —*if* he wants to use it."

That's the kind of a guy he was, you see. You never knew where you stood with him, and suspected him of connivings and plans and devious machinations beyond the ken of ordinary, uncomplicated bollbusters like myself. Sometimes a dude that doesn't like to put the cards on the table is a strong, silent colossus. Just as often he's bluffing.

Well, Doc Searles, with suitable clucking and cackling, taped up my sore ribs, which were the sum total of my wounds. The Doc always died the death of seven dogs when one of us was hurt.

Then I made my way over to the tents in search of Mr. Howes. I found him calmly completing his sun bath. This struck me, off-hand, as being self-consciously dramatic nonchalance, carried to the too-too degree. And yet, when I spake with him, I didn't know.

"Closest shave I've ever had in years of border barbering," I stated as I sat down beside him. "Thanks."

"The pleasure was mine," he said.

Then he turned toward me, leaning on an arm, and said:

"And you're wondering why I never said I could fly; where I learned the trade; just who I am and what makes me tick. So are all the enlisted men, and the officers. The whole town of Mc-

Mullen, I suppose, will be talking me over at the dinner table."

"Correct," I told him.

"I could tell a lot of stories, true or untrue," he said quietly, his eyes scanning the horizon. "I prefer to say nothing. Anything I said, true or untrue, would be investigated—and that would be embarrassing. May I ask, as the only evidence of gratitude from yourself or your friends, that the whole subject be dropped, once and for all?"

"I reckon so," I said. "But if you're in a jam, we can forget it. As a matter of fact, big boy, you act so mysterious that you're ruining your own chance of merging with the common herd, if that's what you wanted to do."

"That shows I'm not a detective in disguise," he pointed out, taking the thought right out of my mind.

He laid there silently for a minute, squinting at the sun. Then he said slowly:

"I'm broke. That's obvious. I will not be long. At the same time that I emerge from the financial desert, I have hopes of emerging from another no man's land, shall I say? I will be grateful if the entire flight, however, ceases to entertain the idea that I am a criminal who is hiding away, and will feel less uncomfortable in my presence, as though I was spying on them. I can say no more."

"And nobody asked you anything," I pointed out. "One more thing, and you'll no longer be the subject of the conversation. It's silly of you to stick on this post, without a pair of pants or a dollar, and just kill time. Why don't you borrow fifty bucks out of my paycheck, and horse around the town a little with us?"

He took a file out of his pocket, and started to clean his nails. Then he shook his head.

"I got myself into it," he said. "I'll go through with it."

He crossed his legs under him, and for a moment was motionless. Finally I got nervous, watching him sitting there like Buddha contemplating his nailfile, so I got to my feet.

"It's your business," I said. "If you punish yourself, don't blame me. Now how about coming over to the recreation room and joining me in a drink to the best one-flight pilot I ever saw?"

"I don't know him," he smiled, "but I will."

And he did, and I did, and a few minutes later, when the boys got home, the flight did. Then Sheriff Trowbridge added himself to the gathering, and helped toast Howes to a golden-brown crisp. Somehow the sheriff's first drink, with his twinkling eyes bent on the stranger, struck me as being funny. There seemed to be more in it than met the ear as he said:

"Here's how—and when!"

For the rest of the evening I caught the oldtimer's crinkled eye boring into the big fellow at odd times, and I figured that the sheriff, at last, had something up his sleeve.

I was getting well trained in the art of asking no questions, because I never got any answers. So I shut up. And the boys shut up, as far as Howes was concerned, that night and thereafter. In fact, the silence reverberated up and down Texas. Even the enlisted men seemed to be banded together in an agreement not to gossip about Howes. I figured that he'd simply talked cold turkey to 'em, and that they'd been glad to do anything he said. If you don't think that the curry-cooking, piano-pounding, surprise-flying stranger wasn't ace high with the rank and file, you're crazy. They'd have eaten his spaghetti and meatballs out of his hand any time.

Nobody even brought up the fact that the mysterious Mr. Young had been flown to McMullen on purpose to see Howes by order of the Commanding General. That was a little ace which Jimmy Jennings, Sleepy Spears, Larry Hickman and myself kept carefully hidden up our sleeves.

THINGS went along easily for about a week, with nothing at all out of the ordinary except that Sheriff Trowbridge seemed to have moved into the flight along with Howes, when there came a night when it was my turn to be officer of the day. That suited everybody, because there was a dance in town and I was the only guy in the flight who didn't heave a wicked hoof. I'd hung some breeches and puttees in Howes' tent, and begged him to put 'em on, add a civilian coat to the ensemble, and go to the dance. It was one of those affairs where the cowboys came in from miles around, and a guy with a necktie on was in full formal dress. As usual, he refused.

We talked a while and had a few drinks and then he practically swept me off my feet by saying he felt like a long walk. I felt like a long sleep, so we split and I cracked the cot with a right good will.

I woke up about midnight, and figured I might as well play soldier and take a turn around the two guards we maintained, one at each gate. Besides, I was thirsty.

The post was about a mile wide, with a road running through it that passed in front of the administration buildings on the south side of the field. Where the road entered and left our domain, a soldier shot craps with himself in a little coop and passed the time of day with anybody who came along. McMullen, that summer, was as active as one of the Pyramids.

I strolled up the tents and into the road, and casually noticed an unusual thing. Gleams of light were coming from the office of the commanding officer—said office being temporarily mine—which was situated in the tiny headquarters building.

I thought the orderly had been careless, although I wondered why the shades were down. Then I spotted a small car in the shadow of the building.

That finished waking me up. It seemed a little out of the ordinary. Just why I decided to slip around the back of headquarters and take a private look-see I'll never be able to tell you, unless it was because Howes was on the post.

It was a dark night, and I was able to sneak up the side of headquarters and take a private peek at the car. A man was sitting behind the wheel, and every once in a while he'd look around at the deserted field. Several hundred yards away, the enlisted men's barracks were dark and quiet, and not even a lizard was stirring on the airdrome.

I heard subdued voices from the office, which intrigued me no little. A moment later, peeking through the interstice between shade and window jamb, the temporary C. O. of McMullen could have been knocked down with slightly less than a sledgehammer.

Facing me, sitting behind my desk, was Curt Howes, in the field uniform of a Captain of Air Service.

He was talking to two civilians whose backs were toward me, and the first words I overheard were enough to flatten me to the wall and cause both left and right ears to quiver.

"Well, you're lookin' at the boss of the works," rasped one civilian.

The back of his head showed a small, wiry, black-haired bird, dressed in a leather vest and a miniature edition of a *sombrero*. I couldn't see below his chest line. His companion was almost entirely outside my line of vision.

"I see," Howes said, cool as a dowager being introduced to the chorus girl her son has just married. "I knew there was a chieftain, so to speak, whom I had not had the pleasure of meeting."

"And I figured you weren't exactly what you was supposed to be, so that makes it even. Talk, mister, because we ain't got much time."

"Remember who you're talking to, sir!"

Howes' words cracked like a whip. Sitting there behind my desk, captain's bars on the collar of my own O.D. shirt, his

white hair gleaming above that square brown face, he looked as much like an officer as I don't.

Just then the curtain blew aside a little, and the man who was keeping his mouth shut exploded on my vision in all his beauty.

In the crook of his arm was a submachine gun.

I know what I should have done then. I should have sneaked off and roused the post and surrounded that office and found out what the score was. What I did do was hold my breath and flatten myself alongside the building and listen with every jumping nerve.

"Listen, Howes, I don't care who you are, see? I'd just as leave knock a tin soldier off as I would a cop."

"Except that machine guns on airplanes would wipe your mob off the earth inside the next hour," Howes said coolly. "I've written a letter to be opened in the case of my death. I've expected your visit."

"This ain't gettin' us nowheres," the wiry little guy said finally.

Evidently the icy Howes had stared him down.

"Now you listen to me," Howes said crisply. "An acquaintance of mine, Grayson—"

"Whaddaya mean, acquaintance!" sneered the squirt, who had a nasty, rasping voice. "Didn't you and him gamble together on boats?"

"Why yes, we did," Howes answered quietly, but suddenly he seemed to turn into congealed dynamite.

"And ain't the both of you under indictment up north for knockin' off a guy that objected to bein' taken for his roll?"

"Yes."

"Well, paste this in your book of army regulations, Captain. If you don't come through, that's just one of the things that's going to happen to you."

"Indeed. How did you learn so much, may I ask?"

"We worked on your pal, Grayson. He talked easy."

For a moment there was a silence like thick soup. Howes never turned a hair. But remembering his condition when he staggered into the post, and surmising that Grayson was Tex, even I felt cold shivers running over me as I thought of what the drawling Tex must have gone through.

"How come a card shark is a captain in the Army?" demanded the little guy finally.

"I'm a reserve officer. I took a notion to go on a year's active duty."

"I thought you had dough! Why, that doublecrossin'—"

"I can command money at a moment's notice—for the proper investment. Now listen. Grayson came to me and said he had met some men with a good proposition. Twenty-five thousand would make a fortune. I gathered it was oil territory, or a gold mine. I said I would be glad to investigate. I was taken to a remote place on the border, as a virtual prisoner, and then discovered that the proposition was not only illegitimate, if there was any proposition at all, but that I was supposed to put up the money for a pig in a poke, and trust Mexican and American thugs to give me my share of the profits. So I refused. Then it became a kidnapping. Finally I was tortured in an effort to force me to secure the money and turn it over to them. Some day I'll get even with Grayson for that. In any event, that is what happened."

"How come you're so finicky about what you invest in?"

"I may not be. I do want a square deal. And I do not trust rats!"

The little fellow stood up, walked forward, and leaned across the desk.

"Why didn't you and your airplanes round up the boys?" he rasped.

"For two reasons. One is that you were camped on the Mexican side. The second is that I did not want my past, as it were, to be aired at the trial."

The little guy seemed to be staring at Howes, as though trying to plumb the depths of a guy who was as easy to

see through as a chunk of coal. Howes was at ease, almost bored, in fact.

"For the same reason," he said casually, "I didn't have you both shot when you sneaked on the post. The resultant notoriety would be very troublesome for me."

"And there's a good reason why we don't write our names on your carcass with that typewriter, too. I ain't in the habit of lettin' a man who knows too much get a chance to shoot off his mouth. Get me?"

"Why am I so fortunate?"

"Because we need your dough, and we're going to get it."

"How?"

"Don't try to bigshot me. You're just a crook like the rest of us—without enough guts to walk in with your guns barkin' and take it."

"That's what you do?" enquired Howes urbanely.

"None of your business what I do!" snarled the little rat. He leaned across the desk again.

"We need your twenty-five grand. And you'll get your cut. If you don't fork it over tomorrow, on the Mexican side of the river—"

"I couldn't get it tomorrow."

"Day after tomorrow then. It's put up—or take what's coming to you."

"I told you that in the event of my death, you'll be hunted all over Mexico and shot down without as much chance as your men gave me."

"Then how about seeing to it that the high and mighty captain gets tried in New York—and gets known as a cardshark in his offtime?"

"It isn't worth twenty-five thousand dollars to me to escape trial," Howes said.

"All right. Then maybe this is. You ain't foolin' me about Grayson. You two are pals. You figured you'd find out what we had, then steal the oil land or the gold mine or whatever it was. And you come in for the twenty-five grand, or your friend Grayson'll go through a wringer that'll make what happened to you seem like a gentle massage!"

For a moment there was a ghastly silence. No threat, with the evidence of Howes himself in the forefront of my mind, could have been more horrible.

Howes just sat there, thinking. I knew how much he thought of Grayson—and I did not believe he could get twenty-five thousand dollars. Any move he made meant disgrace, evidently.

Then the frozen scene broke, as the little fellow straightened, and turned away from the desk. The man with the machine gun stood up. His chief started walking toward my peephole. And Slim Evans drew a long, long breath.

I was looking at Kid Underwood.

He had the eyes of a killer who killed for the love of it. As I looked at his superficially good looking face, those threats became living, crawling entities. He was half Indian, they said. He was also all-weasel.

RIGHT there I sneaked away. There was but one thing to do. Circle around to the enlisted men's barracks, and rout them out. I wasn't half way there when the motor of the car started roaring. A few seconds later the sedan was rocketing down a disused trail which meandered through the chaparral toward the river. Kid Underwood certainly knew the country.

I routed out Sergeant Hay, gulped the story to him, and told him to telephone the sheriff as soon as we'd started the ship on the line.

The motor caught the first time, and I waited not on the order of its warming. I didn't even have my safety belt fastened as I gave her the gun. The cold motor sputtered, but I made it over the hangars. I was without helmet or goggles, flying a cold motor over the mesquite at night, but things were moving so fast, and I knew there was more to come.

Flying only two hundred feet high, I caught that car within two miles of the post. What I wanted to do, if I could, was capture them alive. Mr. Underwood should have a most interesting tale to tell the police of the country.

Consequently I nosed the ship over, and shot a burst from my front guns into the road about fifty feet back of the speeding car. Then I leveled off and roared forward, aiming to shoot another one ahead of them. I figured that would stop them.

But I was wrong. I was perhaps a hundred feet back of them, and a hundred and fifty feet high, when I saw two machine guns poke their noses through the back window of this sedan, and the next second little red dots were dancing at their muzzles.

And a second after that my propeller splintered as those bullets poured into it. I knew, as I cut the ignition, that the shield formed by the radiator and motor was all that had saved me.

There was only one thing to do. I nosed down, keeping the motor as a shield. Within a matter of seconds I'd have to land. So my marksmanship became a matter of importance.

It was funny, somehow—this ship floating down so quietly that I could hear the automobile motor and the rat-a-tat-tat of the machine guns.

I got my bead on the car, and pressed the lever on the stick which opens your guns up wide. A hail of bullets perforated that car, and it stopped, one wheel in the ditch.

I could take no chances. Within fifty feet of the ground, in a dead stick landing, I held the ship's nose on the car and pumped bullets into it until I was about to collide with it.

I had just speed enough left to lift the D.H. over the sedan and set her down in a wide spot in the trail. She bumped along for a moment, and then two trees caught the wings. The trees sheered off, and the next second the DeHaviland smashed straight ahead into a clump of mesquite. I threw up one arm to guard my face, and the compass tore an ugly hole in said arm, but otherwise I was all in one piece.

My reconnaisance of the sedan was made with great care—but caution proved to be unnecessary. Kid Underwood and his two men were thoroughly deceased.

No sooner was this established than Sheriff Trowbridge and a cavalcade of constables came into the picture, foaming at the mouth and covered with sweat. Among them was Curt Howes. He bent a most peculiar and penetrating glance on me.

Before the law could get a chance to question me, I dragged Howes into the underbrush.

"I heard the whole scene in the office." I stated. "I notice you haven't got your captain's bars on now."

"I wore them to keep from being killed," he said quietly.

"Are you really in the reserve?"

"No."

"All right. But Howes, you've got to come clean. What I know is that you wore the uniform of an officer and pretended to be one; that you're an ex-card shark under indictment for murder in New York; that you and your accomplice have been dealing with Kid Underwood and his gang."

"I didn't know him from Adam and had never seen him. All I know was that there was a leader somewhere in the background."

Ordinarily Howes was as relaxed as a tired hound. Now he was like a pointer, quiet but tense. Then he said a surprising thing:

"There isn't any time to lose. Let me get the sheriff. You'll understand things better then."

A moment later the gargantuan Trowbridge heaved over the horizon.

"Nice work, Slim," he rumbled.

"Glad I could get it to do," I told him. "Shoot, Howes."

"Both you and the sheriff know the plot. Tex saved a man's life in a knife fight in Golaya, got friendly, and heard the proposition that twenty-five thousand dollars would make a fortune. He told them I could get it."

"Could you?" I slid in.

"I have a friend. I've lost a good deal of money for that one friend. He put up the bail for that indictment in New York. I could get the money for a legitimate proposition, one which I approved.

"As soldiers of fortune by necessity, we decided to investigate. Tex had supposedly joined the gang. I was just a victim. We took care not to have it known that we were friends. As you heard, Slim, when they had me off in the mesquite fifty miles from here, on the Mexican side of the river, they wouldn't tell me what the proposition was. They tortured me to get the money. But I was positive that there was a proposition, a big criminal project, which needed a lot of cash to swing. It seemed to me that it was a case of paying cash for a large amount of dope. Twenty-five thousand dollars' worth in Mexico would be worth a hundred and fifty thousand here.

"I escaped by a miracle, with Grayson's help. We had decided between us what our course of action should be. That was to act as unasked and unofficial undercover men, uncover this plot, whatever it was, turn in the criminals to the government, and make a deal with the government whereby, as a reward, we resumed our, shall I say, rightful place in society? I may add that during the war, after I was wounded out of the air service, I had some pretense to being a good intelligence man.

"Consequently, I got in touch with the Investigative Bureau of the Bureau of Customs, through the Postmaster of San Antonio, and Young came down to see me. I made a deal with him. We will be acquitted in New York, anyway—it was self-defense—and our gambling was on the level whether you believe it or not. However, coming to trial would reveal my true identity, and ruin lives I value. Young gave me authority to go ahead without benefit of official status.

"The sheriff here was told. I have been under surveillance all the time. Grayson, supposedly now a trusted member of the gang, has been trying to uncover the real conspiracy, but they have not trusted him fully. Then tonight, sheriff, I discovered from Underwood that they suspected Grayson, and tortured him enough to get the true story of our past. That means, sir, that right now they may be going further. When it is discovered that Underwood has been killed, they will certainly work on Grayson until they find out all he knows. Then they'll kill him.

"I have been on the watch, and when Underwood and his men sneaked into the post I interviewed them as an officer. Slim knows about that. It was to save myself, and to get any more information I could.

"Now here's the nub of the matter. I got a letter from Grayson two days ago. You know that bank robbery in Eureka? The gang pulled that. Grayson was with them. He mailed the letter from Eureka."

"What about the letter?" I enquired.

"It's back at the post. Anyway, it says that the situation is that half a dozen guys from Mexico, breeds, Mexicans and whites, evidently own the dope and want to sell it for cash. They're one army. Underwood's men are another. They're all together, waiting for the Underwood men to get the cash. Grayson expected that after the bank robbery, the stuff, which he's never seen, would be moved to the American side of the river. That's because the Underwood men say that they won't plank down the money or do any business on the Mexican side.

"Grayson wasn't trusted too much,

but from what he understands a hide-out has been prepared in an abandoned barn on the American side. The bank robbery money would be paid over as a first payment, the stuff moved to the American side, and handed over when the rest of the money was paid.

"Where Grayson sits now I don't know. What I do know is that we've got to work fast—and I've got to do it."

"Why?" growled the sheriff. "We just swoop down on 'em—"

"That's wrong, sir!" snapped Howes. "What do we get? A bunch of thugs, with the dope buried where nobody could find it."

"We can work on the prisoners."

"The law can't be tough enough to break those men down. And suppose they're still on the Mexican side, where no one has any authority. Now here's what's got to be done."

MR. CURT HOWES had assumed the leadership of the forces of the law without so much as an apology. And neither the sheriff of Hidalgo County, nor the commanding officer of the McMullen flight, felt like arguing with him. Quite a guy, Howes.

"Grayson can't be tortured, regardless of any personal element. If he reveals the fact that we're undercover men, the gang will scatter, and nothing will be accomplished. I made certain arrangements with Young in case of necessity. The necessity has arisen.

"I'll fly down close to the hideout—right now. I'll come in on foot or horseback, and state that the money will be there tomorrow, delivered by a friend. You, Sheriff, will arrange this very night that one of Young's men start down the river with twenty-five thousand in marked money. Behind him, of course, you'll have enough deputies, Rangers and customs men to close in on the gang at a certain signal.

"I'll refuse to turn over any money until I see the stuff they want it for. They won't object. They'll figure on killing me after they get the money, anyway. If it's still on the Mexican side, I'll insist that it be brought to the American side before I signal my messenger to bring on the cash. In that way, we can be sure of rounding up the whole gang, as well as the evidence."

"The cash is available?" I asked.

"Yes," rumbled the sheriff.

"You're taking an awful chance, Howes," I told him.

Then, for the first time, I saw the smooth, contained surface of him crack wide open, and reveal the volcanic heat within.

"For God's sake, let's move!" he exploded. "Will you fly me?"

"Sure," I said prayerfully. But I didn't want to. I value my hide. Of course, when I'm cornered, I fight as best I can, but I'm no good at it, although lucky. Complete with uniform, the prestige of the Border Patrol, and a gun in each hand, when I'm cornered I'm about as effective as a sabre-toothed mouse.

A customs man who was with the deputies arrived on the scene, and in about five minutes the whole plan was made. It was decided that Howes should carry five thousand as an indication of good faith, with the other twenty thousand to be delivered when his terms were met. Six gun shots would be the signal for the hidden customs man to enter the scene. Now that Grayson had revealed a presumably criminal past for Howes, it was felt that he could put the matter over without being suspected of government activities.

I never had a chance to say a word. Howes was a dynamo out of control. Back at the post he drew a map of the rendezvous, and likewise of the barn on the American side which might be the present scene of operations. The customs man had sped to town to get the money.

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it, and then use the energy he'd conserved by cleaning up the mop-up troops —between yawns.

I cut the motor a full twenty miles from the cotton field, and we oozed down through the ozone with only the eerie whine of the wires to break the silence. Looking down at that sea of mesquite, and thinking of the sharks in its depths thirty miles ahead, I remember recollecting that down there on earth there were smart people dancing or sitting around fires or reading a good book.

I stalled into the soft field without turning over, and then Howes and I held converse with the night-shirted rancher. The result was that within a few minutes the big fellow and I were on our way up the river on a couple of very good broncs.

We didn't linger, either. We rode fast and hard, and I got my setting up exercises for five years in advance dodging the limbs of trees. Howes was silent. But so is a hot coal silent. The suave, easy star-boarder had completely disappeared; there was hot ice alongside me. As for Slimuel X. Evans, he was just numb. I was so scared I couldn't feel, but the example of Howes had gradually worked me up to the audacious stage of a puppy willing to brave the bared fangs of a polar-bear rug.

Finally, about a mile from our goal, I just had to say something.

"You and Tex Grayson must be the kind of friends you read about," I remarked chattily.

"I can't say that I have any friends, really," Howes responded absently. "You might call him a protegé for whom I have a fatherly feeling."

He broke off suddenly. He leaned forward.

"Hear anything," he snapped.

"No."

But a silent minute later I did—and the fur rose on me as though I'd had an electric shock.

Born down the breeze was a scream, a man's scream, and the very faraway quality in it made it the most horrible thing I've ever heard.

That is, unless its repetition, louder and louder as we got closer, could be called more unbearable. They were not steady, they came at intervals. I will never live to see the night when I won't be subject to nightmares about it. Riding through the blackness of the mesquite, with that awful, indescribable sound making the very air an obscene thing. Helpless and crying with hate and murderous fury, I beat my horse into going faster. I crawl now, even thinking about it.

Howes never said a word. His face was like granite, and his big body rode in the stirrups, like a jockey, as we fairly flew through the chaparral.

Now we could hear strangled groans in between the screams. There wasn't a sign of civilization within ten miles. The torturers were being careless about what noise they made. I didn't need to ask whether it was Grayson. I knew.

We dismounted at the edge of the clearing wherein stood the abandoned barn. Beyond it we could see many horses staked out. We stole forward. An anguished shriek made the air shiver. I am a timid soul, but I could cheerfully have died for the privilege of killing every one inside that barn.

A few seconds later we were peering into the barn through a knothole.

Grayson was tied to a chair. His bare legs were shiny with oil, and a Mexican was applying a blowtorch to them.

A man came up behind Grayson with a red hot poker. He looked like an Indian. A white man, with his back toward us, rasped:

"One eye is burned out, mister. Right now, unless—"

"I'll talk—oh, I'll talk—Don't—"

As the torturers relaxed, and the crazy, drooling Grayson's mouth worked, trying to utter words that would not come, at least a dozen men, besides the tor-

turers, were moving restlessly, or just sitting.

"Come on," rasped the white man leader. "You sent a letter to that——— from Eureka. And you and him—"

"Wait a minute—" gasped Grayson.

The leader gestured. The torch was applied to his feet and legs again. Grayson's croaking scream . . .

All this only took seconds. I was paralyzed. I saw Howes lift a Colt. He squinted calmly down the barrel—but I hope never again to see a face like his, thrown into relief by the light coming through the knothole.

Grayson's scream had risen to heights which no man could have stood for more than a few seconds, when the Colt cracked. Grayson slumped, out of his misery.

They put dogs out of their misery, don't they?

"Beat it!" snapped Howes.

The next second, before that astounded group inside the barn could collect their senses, he had plunged through the nearby door like a tank through a pane of glass.

I couldn't have moved if my immortal soul had been the stake.

In the crook of his left arm was that twenty-five pound bomb. In his right hand was the Colt. And in his eyes and face was a look that was a more powerful weapon than either one.

"Don't move!" he snarled, and his voice was so vibrant that it was louder than a shout. "If I drop this bomb, we'll all be blown to hell, and I wouldn't mind."

That bomb was the only reason on God's green earth, I think, that he wasn't shot before they thought twice.

"Now listen, scum," he went on, his words tinkling like ice, "I shot Grayson because I promised myself I'd personally kill him—and I don't like torture. And here's five thousand dollars with more to come tomorrow if and when I'm satisfied."

He transferred the gun to his bomb hand, so to speak, and threw the five thousand on the dirt floor of the barn. I'll never forget those hypnotized faces, like so many lost souls in the flickering light of a kerosene lamp that might have been the flames of hell. For the moment, at least, he was Svengali and the skunks.

"I've talked to Kid Underwood," he went on. "He told me everything, when he found out exactly where I stood. Unfortunately, he was caught in McMullen, and is dead."

Still they didn't move. No one said a word. Eyes flickered at each other—that was all.

"Now get a few things straight," Howes rushed ahead. "If I'd wanted to, I could have had you all shot up by the Border Patrol or surrounded by customs agents right now. I'm back among the finest collection of bloodthirsty, double-crossing, stinking rats I've ever seen for only one reason. That's because I want to make some money—and run. You've got a fortune in dope hidden somewhere. I'll buy it, lock, stock and barrel. There's five thousand here. There's twenty thousand more, in the hands of a man I trust, which will be delivered to me and any representatives you want to send with me, within an hour's walk of here. There's the rest of the amount the dope may be worth ready for delivery to you within twenty-four hours—*after I see the stuff*. I pay the Mexican outfit the twenty-five thousand they want. I pay the Underwood gang one-half of the stuff's value in this country. Then you all clear out—and my outfit will carry on from there. Is it a deal, or not? There's my five thousand as a sign of good faith. Here I am. What do you say?"

The half-distinguishable faces turned slowly, searching for the answer. They were still under a spell. The lanky, unshaven white man who had been questioning Grayson seemed to be the leader of the Underwood forces. The body of

Grayson might as well have been in the New York morgue for all the attention anyone paid to it.

"Sounds like a deal," rasped the leader.

"How much have you got and where is it?" snapped Howes.

"We'll show you," the leader said. "It's buried near here."

With Underwood dead, it was as though Howes were their leader.

"Okay. But remember this. I'm many times as desperate as any man here. If a man gets behind me—if there's one false move—I drop this bomb and blow us all to hell. I want no one of you swine closer than twenty feet to me. If you shoot me, the bomb'll drop anyway. Shall we start?"

WITH that I started. Suddenly I knew I must get to that ship as quickly as the Lord would let me. Besides, that hypnotic spell woven by the huge apparition of Howes would be broken any minute, and they might think to look for any reinforcements he might have.

I made it into the mesquite, walked my horse silently through the sand, and then mounted and kicked the rested bronc into his fastest gallop. I kept an eye over my shoulder for signs of a rocket, and my mind was in a state of suspended animation. I do remember thinking of what a trek it must have been for Howes to make McMullen after his torture and I was aware of a species of awe at the irresistible drive in the man. I was sure, then, that he was fighting for his spiritual life. A man who *must* come back, and would let nothing stand in his way.

Why he had shot Grayson was no mystery. No power on earth could have kept that horrible wreck of a man from talking—not even the presence of Howes. Shooting his friend had put Grayson out of his pain, automatically proven to the thugs that Howes was a criminal who had a score of his own to settle with the man the gang suspected of being a stool-pigeon.

Howes considered himself a man in the service of the government. Grayson too. Any necessary price must be paid. But, God Almighty, what a spot to be in! I was less than five hundred yards from the tiny speck of light which meant that the rancher was awake, waiting for whatever might develop, when my heart did an Immelman turn as a rocket cleaved through the moonlit sky.

The bronc seemed to understand what it meant, for he leaped ahead as though he'd been shot. I let out a mighty yell in the hope that Sleepy would hear me.

"It's me—Slim! Crank her up, but wait for baby!"

A few seconds later the Liberty burst into a roar. Sleepy was in the front cockpit, waiting for me. His heavylidded eyes were gleaming, and his wide mouth held a tranquil grin as he waved spaciously at the rear seat.

I flung myself in, and he took off. I leaned forward, and shouted the news.

"We mustn't let 'em get across the river!" I screamed.

Then I unreeled the radio antenna, and flashed the agreed upon signal to McMullen. It was simply an S.O.S. Larry Hickman and Jimmy Jennings would be in the air within two minutes, on the scene in a half hour.

Then I forgot the prospect of help, as I looked down at the ground. Galloping through the chaparral, barely an eighth of a mile ahead of eight or ten pursuers and losing ground every second, was Curt Howes. In his arms he was holding a body.

"Watch for machine guns!" I screamed to Sleepy, and he nodded as he nosed over. "Knock 'em off. More of 'em must be digging up the dope!"

He dived at them, and his front guns spoke as I manned the rear Lewis, swinging it on its scarf mount to be ready for the first opening I had. Three

of the gang toppled from their horses, which toppled too, as Sleepy sprayed them with a hail of lead. I saw two of their Tommy guns blaze, and prayed that they'd miss our radiator and prop for the moment at least.

Then, as we passed over them, we became the vulnerable ones. I pumped lead from my rear gun, and two more bit the dust, but some of their bullets zipped through the tail of the ship. Then Sleepy did the most daring piece of flying I've ever seen.

Not a hundred feet above the mesquite, with us a perfect target flying away from the men on the ground, he jammed on full rudder and fairly skidded the ship around so that our motor and radiator would be a partial shield. Our two hundred mile an hour speed dropped to practically nothing, and he had to dive to pick up flying speed. The remaining men on the ground had scattered, but two guns were still talking—

And one of them had something to say to me. It seemed as though my right side had been hit by a club, and I fell forward. I braced up, with the blood pouring from my side, and got myself together. I had a shot at one fleeing rider, bound for the river, with the rear gun, and had the satisfaction of seeing him keel over.

Then I leaned forward to yell to Sleepy again. I was commencing to feel sort of weak and relaxed.

"Howes is safe now. They're on the run!" I yapped. "Get to the barn. Some of 'em must be getting the stuff back across the river!"

"Okay. But they ruined our radiator and it won't be long now!" he yelled back—and I'll be damned if he didn't cut the motor, low as we were, to make himself heard.

As he turned it on again, he took a look at me. His eyes widened a little, and he motioned me to sit down.

I did, because it was hard to stand up any longer.

I did lean over the side, trying to staunch the blood with my hand, and watch what happened without taking any part in it. In a clearing, perhaps a quarter of a mile from the barn, four men were loading boxes on horses. Our motor was missing already, and I could fairly feel the heat of it as the waterless Liberty almost started to melt. It went dead just as Sleepy went into a dive, and started firing at the men below.

I saw the horses run away, and two men fall. We were just about on top of them then, fifty feet from the ground, with no motor.

So Sleepy made a handsome job of it. He leveled off two feet from the ground, and the ship ploughed right into the remaining two men. They didn't flop to the ground quick enough. Sleepy had just speed enough to lift the ship over the mesquite at the edge of the clearing, and I had just strength enough to know what he was doing.

The D.H. hovered and stalled a few feet above the thick chaparral. Then it squashed down into the trees, and I sank into slumberland.

When I did commence to realize that there was such a thing as being alive I found Sleepy Spears lying next to me in the McMullen hospital, and Doc Searles clucking over me, and some nonsense about a blood transfusion between Sleepy and myself was taking place.

"What ho?" I remarked. "This is a bad break. I'm lazy enough already."

"A little patrician blood will take off your rough edges," stated Sleepy. "That was a haul, Slim, no kidding. And damned if we didn't cripple all but two of the——the remnants of the Underwood gang and the Mexican outfit too."

"Was it dope for a fact?" I asked.

"Nearly a quarter of a million dollars' worth at current quotations."

"Boys! Boys! You mustn't talk!" the Doc quavered, so I said:

"What about Howes?"

"Long gone, Grayson too. Howes

didn't kill him! Got him in the neck. They're both in San Antonio, I think. They fixed up a hospital car for Grayson."

Then I dozed off to sleep, or maybe they'd doped me. The next real information straight from the feed box came from Sheriff Trowbridge, who tiptoed in a few days later like a stampede of cattle going over a bridge. I found myself asking questions about Mr. Howes, to which the sheriff drawled:

"Young, the customs man, shore seems bound to keep a close mouth, but it seems like Howes was a government man up to about a year ago, and then got kicked out because his tender heart was his ruination."

"Shielded somebody?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if it was Grayson that made a mistake and Howes kind of backed him up, wouldn't tell on him, leastways, and so they both got bounced in disgrace. Then went to gamblin', and hit the skids. They shore came back though and the New York trial'll never come off."

"Howes his right name?"

"Doubt it."

"He must have had quite a party, snitching Grayson right out from under the noses of that gang."

"Reckon he did—but he wouldn't talk, as per usual."

Right then Sleepy and Hickman and Jimmy Jennings busted in, and Hickman, who was mess officer, was waving a money order.

"From our friend Howes," he said, after suitable remarks about his disappointment at my improvement in health. "That's what I call paying his board."

It was for five hundred bucks, made out to the enlisted men's mess fund.

"Reckon the government give him twenty-five per cent of the value of the dope, him not bein' an official," stated the sheriff.

"Now gaze out the window," commanded Jimmy.

They raised me up, and out in the alley was my favorite brand of roadster. Then Jimmy gave me an envelope. Concealed in same was a bill of sale for the car, and this note—no heading, and only a "C.H." signature.

> "With my best regards. I hope you have some fun with it. And I've promised myself to see you again, soon. Will be in Washington by the time you get this, and do not yet know my address. Some day I hope to have one again."

He will.

Anyway, that was that. But here, for the moment at least, ends the saga of our stalwart star boarder and Slimuel X. Evans, the sabre-toothed mouse. And if I never see him again, there's something I'd like to write in the mud above his grave. He'll die as he lived, essentially alone, and let this be his epitaph:

He blamed nobody but himself for anything—and he never squawked.

A Venture for the Lilies

A Novelette

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

IT WOULD have been difficult to find in the whole prosperous city of Philadelphia, thriving upon the prestige of being the national capital, a more contented and happy man than Captain Nicholas Rawles, as he stood on Price's Wharf and surveyed the tops'l schooner *True Federal*. She was Stonington-built, heavily sparred; and her lines, clean-run and rising in the sheer, with a graceful breadth of beam which spoke for seaworthiness and speed, were calculated to call for the applause of any true mariner, be he a true Federal or not. And what was more to the point, practically speaking, she represented the bulk of Nick Rawles' inconsiderable savings as a trading skipper. His grim face was almost boyishly proud as he thought to himself, standing there on the wharf: "Ah, Nick, she's yours, she's yours!"

So rapt was he that he failed to notice the group hard by who shared his interest, yet his manner was cool and detached when one of them approached and addressed him—a little slender gen-

tleman, this one, dressed in black with a certain faded modishness, a little gentleman with a perky, birdlike presence and a trick of mincing gait.

"Pardon me, sir," said the little gentleman, in a marked French accent, "but I am informed that you are Captain Rawles, and this, your vessel, is for charter."

"Correct, sir," Nick assented after a single lightning glance at the little gentleman's companions. A girl, good looking—yes, beautiful, by Jove! A youngster, keen-faced, alert, an older, dried-up wisp of a man, with a brown nutcracker face framed in a dingy wig. And behind the three of them, a giant half-breed wearing tattered, faded seersucker, whose yellow features and burning eyes revealed an intelligence beyond any the sailor had ever discovered in a mulatto. Frenchies, he decided, *émigrés*, of course.

"If you will permit me, then," continued the little gentleman, pert as a dancing-master, "I should wish to present you to my colleagues."

"If you like, sir," Nick assented again, and the little gentleman waved to his friends, who came forward immediately, a trace of eagerness in their bearing.

"With permission, *mademoiselle*," said the little gentleman. "Captain Rawles—Mademoiselle de Beauregard. Captain Rawles—Monsieur le Marquis de Vrissac, Monsieur le Chevalier de Morhac." The mulatto he ignored.

Nick Rawles bowed. Aristocrats, the lot of 'em, he realized. And although the thought did not enter his mind, he looked not amiss in their company.

"Honored, *mademoiselle*," he acknowledged, baring his head. "Servant, gentlemen." Mademoiselle de Beauregard curtsied slightly; the others matched his bow. "You forget yourself, sir," Nick Rawles suggested to the little gentleman, who made a hasty gesture of deprecation.

"A thousand pardons, Captain. I am the Abbé de L'Orme."

"A clergyman, eh?" queried Nick.

"Of a sort, sir, upon a time," sighed the little gentleman. "And now, if you please, may we consider the business we have in view?"

Nick smiled at them; for the life of him he could not help directing his smile especially at Mademoiselle de Beauregard. She was more than beautiful, he perceived upon closer inspection; of a form subtly rounded, her high-piled hair a warm honey-brown, her eyes of a matching hue, large and lustrous. And despite the dignity of her demeanor, he guessed that she could not be much above twenty. She might even have seemed younger but for the sadness in her eyes, and the ravages of suffering in her oval face, where the cheekbones stood out a thought too prominently, as though she had known fatigue and hunger and sleepless nights.

At the same time, it was typical of him that no evidence of feeling disturbed his craggy features, and he heeded readily the warning of his inner consciousness: "Watch yourself, Nick! No sentiment in business." For the truth was that Nick Rawles was as different in character as in appearance from the usual master mariner. Buck Rawles, they called him in the Philadelphia and London coffee-houses; and he wore easily the extravagant costume of the English beaux of the period; skintight, three-quarter breeches, blue-green in color; polished Hessians; a canary-yellow coat and blue waistcoat; in his hand a tasseled cane and on his head the preposterously gigantic hat, cocked crosswise, which had just come into fashion.

Many stories were told of his exploits abroad, a few of them true. As how, in London, a casual brawl in Vauxhall Gardens had brought him to the attention of the Crown Prince, who had matched him against the Derbyshire Mauler, in a mill which had gone to a twenty-five round draw, after which he had become a favorite of the dandies of White's and the

Cocoa Tree and a participant in their revels. Further, that he had made an issue of calling out, and winging on Hempstead Heath, the captain of a King's ship, who had pressed two of his men on the eastward voyage. And many more of the like. A man chary of intimacy, he was respected as much for his ruthless determination as for his willingness to support those in adversity.

AT the moment, now, he swung calculatingly toward indifference.

"But I am not sure that I should care for your business," he said, pleasantly enough.

Young de Vrissac cried anxiously:

"But you will at least condescend to hear us, sir?"

Mademoiselle de Beauregard kept silent, silent as the mulatto who held himself aloof, his hawk-face turned away.

"But surely, Marquis," Nick answered. "What have you in mind?"

"It is that we would make a charter of your vessel for a voyage to Haiti," exclaimed de Vrissac. Nick shook his head.

"What earthly business could you do there?" he expostulated. "Since the Revolution any white man so unfortunate as to get ashore is sent to the chopping-block. The Negroes—"

Mademoiselle de Beauregard flashed suddenly into speech, and her voice fascinated Nick as had her face; it was the kind of voice he had anticipated from her, deep, passionate, ringing with a far-off note of mystery, of promise beyond the scope of a man's imagination.

"We do not go to make business with the *nègres*," she said. "We go to make a rescue of our friends." Nick stared at her in amazement.

"Why, there isn't a Frenchman left alive," he protested.

"Ah, but yes, Captain Rawles! A few, who have contrive' for themselves a fort on the Morne Loup, south of Port au Prince. We have had word of them but yesterday. Blaise!" She snapped her fingers at the mulatto, who gave over his introspections with a muttered: "*Oui, m'selle.*" "This one," she went on, "is overseer for my fiancé—"

"Your fiancé?" Nick repeated involuntarily, and then wished he hadn't—why, he couldn't be sure.

"But who else?" she replied haughtily. "Monsieur le Baron du Hamel, to whom I have been affianced since I was of the age of sixteen."

Nick Rawles regarded her speculatively.

"It seems a long time," he said.

She ignored the observation.

"This Blaise," she continued, "has done an act most heroic—for a *mulâtre*. He has escape' from Morne Loup, stole' a boat of a fisher and boarded a passing American ship, which has carried him here."

"You must excuse the animal, sir," de Vrissac interpolated. "It has no English."

Nick, for all his perplexity, detected a gleam in the mulatto's eye, and asked himself whether "the animal" was as ignorant as was presumed. There was intelligence in Blaise's face—and some weeks in an American ship! But he returned his attention to the debate.

"And the message?" he suggested.

She flung out her hands in a gesture of appeal. "Mos' piteous! My fiancé and some others—gentry of the plantation', a few of the soldier' and officer' from Port au Prince, of the *bourgeoisie*, some of the *négres* who are faithful—they have make a fortalice of the estate of Monsier le Baron, which is mos' strong, on the Morne Loup by the coast. We mus' do for them something! It is not right that they perish after what they have survived. And there are women and children with them."

Nick Rawles looked from her face,

tragic with emotion, to the *True Federal,* lying beside the wharf.

"There'd be fighting," he said. "And those waters are dangerous."

She shrugged as only a great lady can shrug.

"Death will come to all, soon or late," she said.

And the Abbé spoke up:

"I have neglect' to inform you the Chevalier is *capitaine de frégate* in the service of his late Majesty." They all bowed their heads as if a holy name had been invoked. "He knows well those water'."

Nick, eyeing Mademoiselle de Beauregard uncomfortably, persisted:

"But there'd be fighting."

"Ah, but you have the cannon and the good crew, we are told, Captain," de Vrissac exclaimed in his quick, hearty way.

Nick agreed proudly. "A long eighteen on the fo'c's'le, and a dozen twelve-pounders broadside. As for the crew, 'tis as much as the liberty of any one of 'em is worth if we're overhauled by an English man-o'-war."

"So," smiled the Chevalier de Morhac, speaking for the first time in a high, cracked voice, "you are well-prepare' for the fight, *hein?*"

"But you forget, Chevalier," the American reminded him, "however much I may sympathize with you, and I do, this is not my affair. I must think of my ship and my men."

A ruefulness overcast the group, and abruptly Nick Rawles was sorry for them. He liked them, for one thing, because they appreciated his schooner. And he admired the gallantry with which they wore their tarnished finery, the suggestion in their bearing of great folk supporting unflinchingly the stings of exile and poverty. As a Federalist, too, he was bound to sympathize with the Royalist *émigrés,* detesting the influence of the Revolution, which was impregnating the infant United States with Thomas Jefferson's insane theories of universal democracy. In a sense, he was a Royalist, himself.

"I am sorry," he apologized. "If 'twere only myself—"

Mademoiselle de Beauregard looked at him curiously.

"It is to be seen you are one not fearful of danger," she answered. "But figure to yourself our plight, sir." And whether by design or instinct, a note of intimacy crept into her golden voice. "It is for us, not only what is, what is to be, but what has been. Myself, *mon capitaine,* I am twenty-two year' of my age. My mother, my so beautiful mother, rode to her death in the tumbril; and at the step of the scaffold my father pushed aside the guard, and bowed over her hand. 'In this place, *madame,*' he said, 'it is not the ladies who have precedence.' And then he kissed her on the lips, and she called after him: 'At the least, Raoul, we will meet in Paradise.'"

NICK could hear the soughing of the water around the piles, and it seemed to him like the faint, murmurous roar of a mob screaming for blood. The *émigrés* were staring into the sunset sky as intently as the mulatto, who had resumed his detachment. Her voice when she spoke again after an interval, beat upon his eardrums like church bells clanging in a forest; slowly, solemnly, more impressive for being unseen. It was as if she did not speak from the wharf beside him, but from another place and in another time.

"A week later, my brother Amand. He would have been four years older than I this day—'Amand Henri Louis Marie, called de Beauregard, son to the *ci-divant* Duc de Beauregard, Royalist, Aristocrat, Traitor to the People,' they describe' him in the death-list I hear the jailers read. And the next week my second brother Pierre, a little lad, who calls

to the jailers when they read him off: 'Yes, *canaille,* and proud of it!' They told us afterward, those jailers, that the guard at the scaffold said to one another: '*Peste,* the little aristocrat makes a good death!' "

She paused again. Nick Rawles felt himself weakening. There was a quality of daring in the woman, of greatness of soul, which made it strangely difficult for him to cling to the precepts of trade by which he was accustomed to order his life.

"I say little of my own sufferings," she resumed, "but I have known such humiliation of my person, such torment—" A motion of her hand conveyed to him more explicitly than words what she left unsaid. "I have spent months in the Temple. I was carried from it by two nuns—to die, as they thought. Yet I am here, *mon capitaine,* alive, and in my right mind. And I must have been spared by the good God for a purpose, even as were spared those other', my so few friends. I have ask' myself often for what it was, and when Blaise came yesterday I knew. *Mon enfant!*" She addressed the giant mulatto in a flow of French beyond Nick's comprehension; his face twitched, his eyes flashed, and presently he burst into a sibilant patois as rushing as her own speech. She shuddered as he concluded, and there were tears in her eyes.

"I wish you might have understanding of what Blaise has said," she exclaimed. "The *nègres,* they have the power to make a story real, like children. And this Blaise has in him, to speak truth, the blood of the father of my fiancé." A slight flush stained her cheeks. "I tell you because that is the reason we believe what he tells us. Also, the *nègres* have killed many of the *mulâtres* for their white blood."

Nick glanced at the mulatto, who stood, with hands clenched fast at his sides, white teeth gleaming, staring from one to the other of the *émigrés.* Yes, the man felt deeply what he had just told. But Nick promptly forgot Blaise as he gauged the stark horror mirrored in Mademoiselle de Beauregard's face.

"How can I say it?" she groaned. "They not only kill us, they torture us, they dance around us as we burn—and they eat us! They eat of the children before the eyes of the mother. And for the mother—no, it is not to be said! It is, if you conceive, a Terror worse than in France, a Terror of one race against another. Everywhere the *nègres* have the success—except where my fiancé resists them on the Morne Loup."

"You must be proud of him, *mademoiselle,*" Nick said diffidently.

"I am," she replied. "And now, *mon capitaine—*"

"I'll go," he promised, "providing I can persuade my crew. I'll have to tell 'em, y'know." Her face lightened.

"Ah, you are of us, *mon ami,*" she cried. "I made certain of it." She appealed to her friends: "Are we not fortunate, *messieurs,* to find a comrade of a so grand *noblesse?*"

Impulsively, gracious as a queen, she offered him her hand; and although it was not his custom, he bent and touched his lips to her fingers, workworn from the needle and sewing-palm. And the Frenchmen clustered about him, voluble with thanks.

"My faith," chuckled the Abbé, "if you cannot handle your fellows, Captain, leave them to *mademoiselle.*"

And the ancient Chevalier, in his creaking voice:

"As good a man as any of us, *mon capitaine,* and more adroit of mind." But she put aside their compliments, gently rebuking them: "I am but one of many who serve the Lilies, *messieurs.*" And more seriously to Nick Rayles: "You have not name' your price, *mon ami.*"

Nick stammered.

"Whatever you have in mind," he brought forth at last.

"You are too generous," she chided. "We are not without means for such a venture."

"I'll not take a profit," gulped Nick. "If a thousand dollars a month—"

She smiled. "But how if some of your men are hurt or killed?"

"That will be my business," he answered stubbornly.

"Tchut!" She patted his shoulder, yet so impersonally that it irked him. "Our friends on the Morne Loup have with them a sum of treasure. Out of that we will care for your men."

"Unnecessary," he growled. "Blood-money."

"But yes," she assented gravely. "Money to pay for the blood of so brave Americans, who risk their lives for desperate ones they do not know. Let us speak of this no more. After all, *mon ami*, we are of the same kind. If you would not take unfairly from us, we would not take unfairly from you."

So they left it, turning to the practical details of the voyage: the number of *émigrés* to be embarked; the berthing of them; supplies, stores, weapons. As for the sailing date, the French urged that it be set as early as possible; and to protect the venture from possible interference by the American government, the Abbé suggested that Nick should take out clearance papers for Curaçao in the Dutch West Indies "with passengers and ballast."

Nick was secretly amused to find himself more excited than he had been since he took his first command to sea. His enthusiasm must have been infectious, for he made short work of his mates, George Goss, a stalwart young Long Islander, and Penurious Harty, who had been a gun-captain in the *Bon Homme Richard* and was always keen for an opportunity to lay a piece. With their help, it was easy to talk over the crew. Extra stores were soon shipped, and hammocks slung in the afterhold for thirty-three *émigrés*. His own cabin Nick relinquished to Mademoiselle de Beauregard, himself doubling up with Goss—it never occurred to him until long afterward that he accepted her inclusion in the expedition as casually as did her companions.

There was an anxious moment when he went to the Custom House for his papers, but the Abbé had circulated a story that he and his friends were planning to buy up sugar lands in the Dutch Indies; and waterfront gossip, scouting so prosaic an explanation, had fostered a yarn of sunken treasure off the Bahamas. So the only comment of the Collector of the Port was: "A prosperous voyage to you, Captain. If you miss the Spanish gold, why not try for a cargo of molasses? New England clamors for it, now the British Indies ports are closed to us."

THE *True Federal* dropped down the stream with the ebb on a sunny day of late spring. She had favorable winds; but off the Delaware Capes a British frigate attempted to close, assuredly short of hands, and they were obliged to run far to the eastward to escape a boarding party. Then they headed south again, and made fair weather of it, with the exception of one interval of storms off the Floridas.

The Frenchmen suffered the inevitable discomforts of the sea with sprightly fortitude, and fraternized amiably with the crew, amusing themselves at fencing and fishing or learning the handling of the sails and the wheel. The mulatto, alone, stood apart from the company, but he responded courteously to Nick's kindliness and was never remiss in his arduous tasks in the galley, where he helped the over-worked cook. A good man, Nick decided.

Nick liked the Frenchmen more than he had expected. They were a hand-picked lot, of course, tempered and toughened by the bizarre adversity of

their fate:—younger sons of titled families, gentlemen of the *petite noblesse* and the robe, officers of the Army and Navy, a physician, family servants whose devotion had placed them on a level of paternal equality with their masters.

Best of all, however, Nick enjoyed the effect of the winds and the sun and the boundless green meadows of ocean upon Mademoiselle de Beauregard. Day by day, the sadness faded from her eyes. And as it faded, their intimacy increased. They were Cécile and Nick to one another, each delving into the other's past—she telling him of her youthful years at Court, of the contrasting drama of the Revolution, the trials of exile; he of his boyhood at sea, his travels to the farther Indies, the barren wastes off the Horn and the languorous isles of the South Seas, his adventures in dissolute London.

She was shocked to hear of his encounter with the Derbyshire Mauler—"But, Nick, to fight with the bare hands a so common oaf! Yet Monsieur le Prince approved, and he is call' the First Gentleman of Europe. *Ciel!* I do not understand the English, not me."

It was then he asked her shyly, an odd experience for him:

"Monsieur le Baron—what does he look like? If you do not mind, Cécile."

She wrinkled her brows. "How can I say, *mon ami?* I was but sixteen. His father and mother brought him to my father and mother—and me. It was at Versailles. And then he must go to Haiti to build for me a villa on the estate, Morne Loup."

"You were over-young for wedding," frowned Nick.

"But there was the Revolution, *hein?*" she remonstrated, not indignantly. "And it is the custom so to do in France."

Their relations had an eerie quality; they met upon a plane remote from ordinary sensations. Nick Rawles understood instinctively that the code which had impelled her to this venture was equally capable of impelling her to the destruction of any emotion she might consider a violation of it. And so they trembled, the pair of them, closer and closer to the verge of desire, the vague spectre of Georges, Baron du Hamel, their sole restraint, a restraint the more potent because of the specter's lack of physical identity. It would have relieved Nick, perhaps, had he been able to create within himself an honest hatred of the man; but everything he heard about du Hamel—from Cecile, from the other *émigrés*—inspired him with a reluctant admiration for this unknown who had valiantly maintained a foothold for the Lilies in the midst of the vengeful hordes of blacks.

Try as he might, Nick could not banish du Hamel from his thoughts. What was the fellow like? How did he walk? Was he kind? Was he vain? Was he simple, genuine? Was he—most important of all—in love with Cécile after all the years which had elapsed since their one meeting at Versailles? Occasionally, Nick was tempted to strain his slender store of French in an examination of the mulatto. Surely, Blaise could describe the man who was at once his brother and his master. But some obscure fetish of taste sealed the American's lips.

FROM the latitude of the Floridas Nick set a course wide of the Bahamas, to avoid British cruisers prowling the narrow seas between the islands and Cuba and the Florida main. He was comfortably south of Mariguana before he came about and stood in for the Windward Passage, taking care to keep out of sight of Mortimer and approaching Cape Maisi only close enough to make a landfall and verify his position.

Then, with a nor'-easter driving her, every sail taut and driving, the *True Federal* stormed through the Passage, a

lookout at both mastheads, traversed the mouth of the great gulf which bisects the northwestern extremity of Haiti and rounded the prong of the island which thrusts out toward Jamaica. Dangerous seas, these, for an American vessel, even though the United States and Britain were at peace. Nick was thankful to have the Chevalier de Morhac conning the wheel, for they must keep in as close as they dared to the beetling Haitian shore, in the knowledge that no King's ship would lightly chance its reefs and shallows.

That night, wafted distinctly on the scented land-breeze, they heard the thudding of drums, beaten with a nervous, varying stroke, a sound so sinister, so instinct with evil, as to start the shivers prickling down a man's spine. The Chevalier called a question to Blaise, who stood by the starboard bulwarks, listening; the mulatto answered briefly, and de Morhac nodded.

"The *nègres* make the dance," he said.

"Or it may be they signal a strange vessel," suggested Nick. "I have heard the jungle drums on the Ivory Coast. They always meant trouble, an alarm."

Cécile shuddered beside him.

"Me, I would prefer to hear the werewolves scream," she exclaimed.

In the middle of the forenoon of the next day they raised a long, forested eminence, and the Chevalier grunted.

"Morne Loup," he creaked, and handed the prospect-glass to Nick, who, peering intently through the lens, recognized, indeed, a rough semblance in the hill to a crouching wolf, its head pointed in their direction. As the schooner drew nearer, he descried a huddle of buildings under a bushy hummock, sticking up like a tufted ear, and presently a flagstaff, the white banner of Bourbon France, emblazoned with the golden Lilies, flung out against the green background of the jungle. Involuntarily he offered the long tube to Cécile, who adjusted it with shaking fingers.

"Oh, the good God is kind," she cried. "But see, *messieurs*, all of you! How brave! To think that in this place of loneliness and terror the Royal Standard flies!"

"Here is France," echoed de Vrissac.

"*Mon Dieu!* Here, if nowhere else," agreed the Abbé, wiping his eyes on a fragment of handkerchief, its yellowed corner crested with a coronet.

A cheer swept the crowded deck, and the *émigrés* pressed forward, each one anxious for a glimpse of this one remaining outpost of the régime they had served. Even Blaise hung about the outskirts of the throng, and willingly accepted the glass after the others had been satisfied. But where they had scrutinized the hilltop, Nick observed, the mulatto trained it on the foreshore, studying carefully the barrier of emerald-green jungle which backed the dazzling beach.

"Ask him what he makes of it," Nick suggested to Cécile. "Are there any blacks in there?"

Blaise's vigorous gesture of denial was sufficient answer to her question, but he supplemented it with a burst of patois.

"He say' he does not understand, Nick," she translated, "but it is as if the jungle were empty."

At this instant, the white banner on the hilltop was dipped, and a puff of smoke drifted above the trees. Faintly, the boom of a small cannon reached them across the interval of land and water. Tears welled in Cécile's eyes.

"We must give heart to those who have kept faith so long," she exclaimed. "Fire a cannon, Nick. But wait!" She darted down the cabin-hatch, to return immediately and thrust into his arms a bundle of silken stuff. "Our banner, Nick, the banner of France! Is it that I ask too much of you to show it on your mast?"

Nick smiled, and beckoned to a sailor.

"Bend this to the fore rigging, under the tops'l-yard," he instructed. "And

my compliments to Mr. Harty, and ask him to loose one of the la'b'd carronades, unshotted."

The crew cheered as heartily as the *émigrés* as the Lilies flaunted out above the *True Federal,* and the boom of Harty's carronade responded to the appeal from Morne Loup.

Nick Rawles shook his head doubtfully.

"I misdoubt me that will carry as far as the drums we heard," he said. "May we edge in closer, Chevalier?"

"With a boat ahead to take soundings it should be safe," de Morhac assured him. Nick gave the necessary orders; sail was shortened, and the schooner stood in for the shore, the advance-party calling back the depth as they proceeded.

Nick rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"And now," he said, "we are at the turn of the venture, my friends. Here we are—there's Morne Loup. What's your plan?"

They looked doubtfully at one another. Even Cécile wrinkled her eyebrows dubiously. For none had given definite thought to the climax of the voyage.

De Vrissac spoke first.

"Why—why—we will land," he said. "Monsieur le Baron will see that we come ashore, and fetch his people to meet us."

Nick Rawles snorted. "With the bush, perhaps, full of Negroes? Think, Marquis!"

"*Parbleu,* it is that he speaks the sense," exclaimed the Abbé.

"But what then?" cried Cécile. "Must we leave our friends to arrange their escape unaided?"

"On the contrary," returned Nick. "I suggest we set Blaise ashore after dark. He is the only one of us who knows the jungle paths. If he succeeds in reaching the fort he can advise your friends that we will meet them on the beach at dawn, prepared to guard their embarkation. If he fails, why, we shall be no worse off than we are now."

"Excellent," approved the Abbé. And de Vrissac led a chorus of agreement from the *émigrés.*

"Let us instruct the animal, Cécile," he urged. But before she could speak the mulatto had spun around on one calloused heel, his burning eyes alight with intelligence, patois flooding from his lips.

Hell, Nick thought, the feller understood me.

And Cécile exclaimed: "But he speak' what you did, Nick! He would go."

SHE was too excited to realize the implication of the incident, nor did any of the Frenchmen, and in the resultant babble of discussion Nick held his peace. There was enough to occupy his attention in nursing the schooner to an anchorage within cannonshot of the shore, and overseeing preparations for the night's work—the batteries must be cast loose and the guns tentatively sighted, the carronades chocked up to increase their range and the Long Tom wheeled into position on the starboard side; shoreward; powder and shot carried up from the magazine; plans arranged for a possible action.

After a discussion with his mates, Nick decided to land eighteen of the crew, with himself and Goss, leaving Harty and twelve others to man the battery, if necessary.

"And damme if I can see how thirteen pairs of hands can manage seven guns," he added.

But Harty wagged his grey beard reassuringly. "Never ye be consarned, sir. 'Lowin' for the niggers makin' trouble, we'll brown 'em proper."

"Right he be, Cap'n," contributed Goss. "And don't ye forgit the twenty of us will be hard put to it jest to row the boats. There'll be fifty-three bodies to the loads."

It was true, Nick agreed. Also, there'd

be more than three loads to ferry offshore, granted the Morne Loup garrison could be rescued.

Evening came with the sudden rush of a wild beast, the sun sliding down behind the Caribbean in a blaze of savage splendor. The jungle masses darkened, became mysteriously menacing. Above them the summit of the Morne loomed against the glare, and as they watched a gun was fired and the Lilies drooped toward the ground.

Nick called quickly: "A man to unstop that flag, Mr. Goss. A blank shot, if you please, Mr. Harty."

"Always of you the true *politesse,* my Nick," Cécile murmured.

"I should have remembered," he replied uncomfortably. And when the gun roared, and the *émigrés* uncovered with exalted faces to their descending colors: "Mr. Goss, we'll lower the sta'b'd whaleboat," he added. "Abbé, I'm taking you and de Vrissac and eight of your people, four of mine. . . . Chevalier, I'm leaving you to command the two following boats. We'll show two lights, if Blaise gets through, as signal for you to start."

He felt Cécile touch his arm in the confusion, and drew back from her—there could be no more intimacy between them. Not with Georges du Hamel waiting to be rescued on the Morne. She was become as remote from him as the stars commencing to blister the sky overhead. Her eyes, he saw, were glassed with tears.

"May the good God help you," she was saying.

"We'll do," he answered almost roughly. "Don't worry."

He turned to check the men going over the side, and found the mulatto beside him.

"Here, lad," he said involuntarily. "You aren't armed. Mr. Hardy, a cutlass for Blaise."

Blaise accepted the weapon, then made a gesture as if to return it.

"It may mean your life, lad," Nick pressed him. "Take it."

Blaise bowed, as courtly as de Vrissac. "*M'ci, m'sier,*" he assented.

"Won't cumber you like a musket," Nick added. "Over with you, now."

Again, the mulatto bowed, comprehending. And again, in the prevailing excitement, nobody noticed it except the American.

Nick dropped into the stern sheets of the whaleboat, and shipped the steering-oar. Looking upward, he had a momentary vision of Cécile's face, flowerlike in the red flare of the battle-lanthorns Hardy was kindling along the bulwarks. Her lips were moving, but he couldn't hear what she said.

"Cast off," he ordered brusquely. "Keep a good watch for our signals, Mr. Goss. And see that your matches are lighted. Don't suffer a strange craft to board you."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The whaleboat caught the pull of the tide, swung to it easily, as Nick steered for the sound of the surf.

THE lofty contour of the coastline became visible in the starlight, and he was recurrently conscious of the same quality of dark and hostile strength as he had felt off Africa. But the silence was disturbed only by the oars, the leap of fish, the rising voice of the surf. He could see this last, now, an interminable white line, heaving rhythmically. Child's play to pass it, fortunately. A lift to the bow, a sensation of alien power beneath the keel—and they were through, the water calm around them.

"*Hélas,*" exclaimed de Vrissac. "No drums!"

"Almost, I could wish there were," answered Nick. He produced a night-glass. "Pass this for'ard to the mulatto," he directed. "Ask him if he makes out anything."

Blaise peered long at the silvery stretch of beach, the black wall of jungle.

The silence was smothering. Blaise ejaculated a phrase.

"He says there is nothing," interpreted the Marquis.

"So be it," rejoined Nick. "We'll land him, eh?"

"It would seem best to lose no unnecessary time," agreed the Abbé.

"Oars, lads," ordered Nick. "Give way."

The bow ran up on the shore with a swish of sand. Blaise was overside in an instant, knee-deep. Several of the sailors tumbled after him, and steadied the boat.

"We'll be waiting for you, Blaise," Nick hailed, "close enough in for you to see us."

"*Oui, m'sieu'.*" The reply was like a long-drawn sigh.

As the mulatto trotted toward the jungle, de Vrissac exclaimed:

"*Peste!* It would seem the animal has knowledge of your English, if he does not speak it."

"So I have noticed," Nick answered. "We'll back water, by your leave, gentlemen. No advantage in risking more than necessary."

The sailors gave a shove on a receding wave, and the whaleboat glided offshore until Nick by a sweep of the steering-oar steadied it in slack water, where an occasional stroke sufficed to hold its position.

The Abbé rubbed his hands together. "A moment, *mes amis*, I scarce had the courage to hope for! A portent of success, *hein?*"

"But naturally," cried de Vrissac. "You agree, my Nick?"

Nick surveyed the inperturbable battlements of Morne Loup. "The danger is all in front of us. If you will be guided be me, you will rest."

Except for a casual remark now and then, an order from Nick to the sailors, who drowsed on their oars, the hours dragged by in a silence as exaggerated as that which blanketed the jungle. It was drawing toward midnight when a faint whistle stole across the water.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the Abbé, with a reverence he seldom exhibited. Nick raised the nightglass.

"You see him?" begged de Vrissac. "The animal is really returned?"

"There is one figure," Nick answered slowly. "We'd best row closer,"

They were yet some distance from the beach when the Marquis hailed, and at the first reply cried: "It is he! Of a truth, it is he!"

There was a swift exchange of question and answer as the boat proceeded, an equally swift explosion of side remarks by de Vrissac— "He has succeeded!" "Yes, they are safe!" "They come!" "At the dawn they will be here!" In his ecstacy, he threw his arms around Nick, nearly separating the American from the clumsy steering-oar, then hurled himself upon the Abbé, who was no less distraught.

"Damme," quoth Nick Rawles. "We'll never get them at this rate. Recover yourselves, gentlemen."

They drove up on the beach in a flurry of foam, the Abbé and de Vrissac as quick into the water as the bow oar. Nick followed more leisurely, stopping to bid two of the crew make ready the lanthorns and all of them to look to their arms. He could hear the voices of the Frenchmen rising more excitedly; and as he came nearer was on the point of urging more caution, but when he descried the tall figure standing between them he exclaimed:

"But where is Blaise? Can this be *mademoiselle's—"*

"But this is Blaise," retorted the Abbé.

"The animal's self," reiterated the Marquis. "And he tells a tale the most *incroyable!"*

Indeed, the spectacle was incredible at first sight to Nick. For there was Blaise, who had left them a few hours since, barefooted and dingy, wearing with dignity the uniform of a Colonel of French infantry—shako, white tailcoat, crossbelts, sabre and polished boots, all. As gallant a soldier in bearing as the Guardsmen the American had known in London!

"What is this tale?" Nick challenged.

"Ma pristi! Why, that he took the apparel from a wandering *nègre*, and assumed it for purposes of disguise. He would have us credit that such is the Haitian uniform. An insult the most vile tc France!" De Vrissac was frantic with rage.

"Well, why not?" Nick said. "The Haitians knew no other uniform. And for the rest, the good fellow is probably a child at heart. Would you blame him for flattering his natural vanity? Damme, Marquis, he makes a pretty figure of a man!"

De Vrissac's reply was purple. As he concluded, the mulatto produced an object he had been carrying unostentatiously in his right hand.

"Voici votr' p'tit sabr', mon capt'ne," he said in his grave, resonant voice.

"There's your answer," exclaimed Nick. "He not only comes to you in a Haitian uniform, ignorant of the resentment it would arouse in you, but he voluntarily yields the weapon I gave him because he has found a better one. And what is more, gentlemen, is it not sufficient proof of his friendship that he has returned at all, and that he has apparently fulfilled his mission?"

Nobody spoke for as long as it took the Abbé to inhale a pinch of snuff.

"The truth, *ma foi,* the truth," ad-

mitted de L'Orme. "Such it is to be swayed by the prejudice of hatred!"

"It is not hatred to resent the foulness of the *nègres*," fumed de Vrissac.

"Still, Marquis, you have been in the wrong," Nick answered. "You will take no offense, I hope. But the fact is that the issue of our expedition is at stake. Are you satisfied with the man's report?"

De Vrissac ground his heel in the sand, and looked from his companions to the mulatto, who contained himself with the dignity which seemed second nature to him.

"I must be," the Marquis agreed honestly. "His report is of the explicit. There are one hundred and eighteen of the *pauvres miserables* left alive. They are at the last ebb of fortune, ammunition almost gone, pressed even for food. They are overjoyed to descend tonight. And it would seem an act of God that we are come at this minute, since for several weeks the *nègres* have made little annoyance for them."

Nick pondered. He wished he were able to talk in detail direct to Blaise.

"That is not saying the drums we heard will not bring an army of them against us," he answered. "Did he speak—" Nick forced himself to ask this question— "did he speak of *mademoiselle's* fiancé?"

"Freely and intimately," the Marquis answered. "Monsieur le Baron has but just recovered from one of his touches of the fever. He has conducted an expedition at a nearby resort of the *nègres* for stores and been beaten back—*Sacré nom de Dieu!* Is it a wonder I have hesitate' to trust one of these people?"

"Nevertheless, Marquis, it is my belief you have beside you an unusual man," Nick retorted. "With your permission, I will signal the schooner for the rest of our party."

The two lanthorns had scarcely glimmered from the tops of oars when a pair of answering lights were run up to the schooner's main yardarm.

"So, now, we repose in the lap of God," murmured the Abbé.

"For myself," grinned Nick Rawles, "I shall repose for the time being in the whaleboat, a reasonable distance offshore."

THEY sat in the boat, each man taut as a fiddle-string, listening for the beat of oars, the rumbling of jungle drums, watching the gloomy, half-seen slopes of Morne Loup. The light was gathering behind the curve of the Atlantic; the sky was fading from its purple hue of night. The dawn had not come, but the death of night was imminent. The far-flung lines of Morne Loup were growing starker; the jungle was creeping, minute by minute, closer—a monster to be seen, now, rather than to be felt. It was as silent as before. The very wind had died. And Nick Rawles was praying to himself—blasphemously, as it happened—that the wind wouldn't shift with the break of dawn. A strong offshore wind would deliver the *True Federal* to the pagan gods of the sea, as a strong onshore wind would deliver her to the pagan gods of the jungle.

Abruptly, the mulatto raised his head attentively; seeing him do so, Nick cocked an ear to leeward. No mistake. He heard faintly the threshing of oars through the diminishing pulse of the surf. Within a minute he had focussed the two boats in the lens of his nightglass.

"Our people are coming," he said. "We'll pull out to meet them. Show a light for'ard. Blaise can hold it."

The men gave way heartily, and Nick steered up alongside the longboat, but he checked on the steering-oar as he recognized the voice which hailed from her stern sheets.

"Cécile!" he gasped. "Why are you here?"

"Ah, *mon ami,*" she answered lightly. "Is it, in truth, you? Why, I am come in the place of the Chevalier, who has decide' that he can be of the more service to assist with the cannon."

"I'll see you set back aboard," Nick told her sternly, "if I have to row you out alone."

"*Monsieur!*" Her tone was equally cold. "It is not for you to say that Cécile de Beauregard shall do the this or the that."

"But this is dangerous work!" he exclaimed.

"And what is danger but a bright face to be admire'?" she retorted, again gay. "What have you heard of our *pauvres amis?*"

"Damme," Nick swore most inelegantly, the Abbé hauling at his coat-skirts. "Do you tell her, Marquis. I'll have no hand in this."

They pulled for the beach, the second whaleboat on Nick's quarter, and Cécile was first in the water before Nick could discard his oar. He was amused, and at the same time vexed, to note that the mood of the *émigrés* had changed. They were no longer serious but gay, taking their step from her, making of the expedition a party instead of an adventure. And it disturbed him; it was not his idea of the situation.

He was more disturbed when he finally penetrated the admiring group of Frenchmen and sailors surrounding her. She was, he must admit, a valiant, boyish shape in the dripping blue coat she wore, a light dress-sword at her side, her belt bristling with miniature pistols; but she did not belong there. He peered up at the giant bulk of the Morne, with its sinister belt of jungles, and shuddered at the thought of her caught in a mêlée of ferocious blacks. By God, he said to himself, she's as much of a menace to us as they'd be, for every man of us would be trying to protect her.

Something of this he tried to tell her, but she froze at once—and what was worse, her compatriots rallied to her support.

"*Mon ami,* she is our luck," protested the Abbé. "We will fight the better, if we must, in her presence."

"But if she should be killed?" Nick said.

"Impossible, with us to protect her," the Marquis answered haughtily.

Cécile shot at Nick a glance compounded of wickedness and humor—to him it was as if she said: "Eh, you see?"

He remembered the fiancé she was rescuing, the fiancé for whom all these men were venturing so much. He stiffened, and bowed.

"As you please," he said, and wandered off to collect Goss and his own men, whom he instructed to remain by the boats.

"By the way," he said, "where is Blaise?"

"The black?" answered the mate. "The last I seed of him, sir, he was over by the jungle, listenin' like."

Nick nodded. Blaise, of course, with his mind on his master and half-brother, was seeking for signs of the approach of the beleaguered garrison of Morne Loup.

It was a warm, still morning, very little breeze astir. Seaward, The *True Federal* rode to her anchor almost motionless, lower courses clued up, tops'ls in the stops. Nick strode up and down, none too happy. He'd been a fool to accept this venture—everything to lose, practically nothing to gain. It was what came of permitting a woman to influence you. And these Frenchies! Good enough people, but insufferably alien. Mercurial. You couldn't depend on 'em. With the reflection, he glanced at the jungle, and observed a flock of birds towering tumultuously out of the tree-tops. He stopped dead. Old Indian fighters of the Pennsylvania frontier had told him of that sign. It meant only one thing. He halted, and hailed Goss. "There's something up, Mister. See your muskets are primed."

Here was reality at last. Men fiddled with their weapons, strained their eyes to pierce the jungle's marshy green barrier. Cécile clutched at a pistol, the look of horror in her face which Nick had seen there once before.

"Me, I am afraid," she said. "Do you hear the voice of the *fourré*? Its branches hiss in the wind like a great serpent. It is worse than the drums. What good can come out of that thing, Nick?" Nick was sorry for her all of a sudden; he forgot the resentment with which he had left the schooner.

"I don't know," he answered kindly, "but I guess we'll have to find out. This is no place to be caught by the blacks, in the open, with the jungle in front and the sea at our backs."

And just at that moment George Goss sang out: "Here they come, Cap'n!"

FOUR men had slid out of the jungle's edge, and were trotting toward the boats. They were shabby men, dressed in common, tattered clothes; they had palmleaf hats on their heads, and sandals of rawhide on their feet. They were gaunt and bearded. They carried muskets, and half a dozen pistols apiece. And as they came they waved hysterically to the *True Federal's* company.

"They're white men," Nick heard himself saying as if somebody else had spoken. He realized that Cécile was holding to his arm.

"White men," she was repeating after him. "Why—why—they are of Monsieur le Baron's people!"

It was the Abbé, coughing over a pinch of snuff, who exclaimed:

"By the Mass—God forgive me! It is du Hamel, himself!"

Nick looked down at her; he could tell from the expression of her face that she was not certain which of the four ragged men was her fiancé. He wasn't sure whether he was glad or sorry. On the whole, he pitied her, her face was so white and still. So much for custom, he thought bitterly.

But presently he found himself equally piteous of du Hamel. The Abbé, of course, acted as master of ceremonies. He stepped forward to meet the ragged men, greeting one by name.

"My dear Baron! How charming to find you whole! And here is your fiancée, who has made possible this encounter—thanks to our American ally, Captain Rawles. Do you speak any English, by the way?"

Part of this Nick could follow. He was embarrassed by the meeting between the two under such circumstances. Cécile was holding herself proudly erect, head high. But the white stillness in her face, as she bowed awkwardly in her boy's rig; "Ah, Monsieur le Baron, it has been a long time, but had we known we would have come sooner. And you will pardon my dress so unmaidenly?"

Du Hamel devoured her with his eyes, which, oddly, had the same burning quality as the mulatto's. He was, Nick owned, a man of distinction. Thin to emaciation, aged by suffering, care and fever. A stern, hard face, hawk nose and high, narrow forehead. A man of resolution. Good quarter deck manner. But hellbent for his own way.

He said something in a low voice to Cécile, bowed low and kissed her hand. And it was then that Nick was sorry for him. The feller'd gone through so much, and he hadn't minded waiting. But he was old, old! Burned out. The wreck of the man who had last kissed her hand at Versailles.

To Nick he showed the courtesy of the great gentleman he was, apologizing for his broken English, which he owed to friends he had visited in Jamaica in the good days long past, offering a soldier's stiff thanks for a sailor's readiness to aid.

"I am tol' by Monsieur de L'Orme 'ow you 'ave been generous, but we will talk of this later, if you please. My peo-

ple are come, and there will be much to do."

"We'll shove 'em off as fast as possible, Baron," Nick answered. "You met the mulatto on the way down?"

"The mulatto?" Du Hamel's face tightened.

"Yes, Blaise. It was Blaise who brought us here," interposed Cécile. "He went to you last night."

Du Hamel's features blanched under their coat of tan.

"*Mon Dieu,*" he exclaimed. "We are betrayed, all of us! That yellow devil! But it was like him. He has the ingenuity of Satan—and how could you know?"

"But what is this?" the Abbé said. "The fellow was clear in his message, and brave in his performance last night."

Du Hamel laughed harshly. "Yes, he would be! Blaise deserted me more than a year ago. It is he who has led the black fiends who besieged us—and I can see plainly that when they continued unsuccessful he made himself the plan to go to Philadelphia and lure *mademoiselle* and our friends into an expedition of rescue, with the intent of tempting my people from our shelter. Ah, but that was not all! No, he took thought that so he would procure so many more French for the torture—and *Sacré Dieu,* of all sports they love best, the *nègres,* it is to have a white woman at their mercy. My friends, we may not talk—we must act! At this moment, be sure, he is marching against us. Fly, all of you who can—half of you—with my men and assist our people to the beach."

"Hell," swore Nick, "I'd have taken oath for the feller this morning!"

"You and many others, my friend," the Baron returned.

"But how did you know we were ready for you?" Nick persisted, not choosing to be brow-beaten.

"We saw your exchange of signals with your ship from our watch-tree. We knew you were whites, that you displayed the Lilies. It was plain we could not move through the jungle until dawn. So we came. It was a chance. But what was that, when we were on the verge of despair? Now, go, I beg you, go, with all you can."

"You go, Marquis," Nick said, coolly self-possessed. "I'll get the boats ready and prepare for the blacks, in case they show up. It's my fault, I suppose, but—"

"But nonsense, my Nick," protested de Vrissac. "You, who have thought for all. We go!"

And de Vrissac pelted off, most of the *émigrés* at his heels, Cécile following them.

NICK let her go. What did anything matter, now, but evacuation as rapidly as possible? He gave the Abbé half a dozen men to watch the beach; with the remainder he launched the boats and turned them bow-out so that there would be no delay in starting. At the least, he figured, they could send away what women and children there were on the first trip. Du Hamel was pacing the beach the while, snarling, but he didn't forget his manners when Nick came up after the boat job was finished.

"You move fast, *mon capitaine,*" he said.

"This is my fault," Nick answered, and explained how Blaise had returned from his mission in gay plumage. "I should have suspected him, then. But the man seemed honest as a child."

The Baron shook his head gloomily. "My fault that I did not have him whipped to death before he deserted me. We were always too kind to the *nègres,* it is the cause of our troubles in the colony. My father—humph, he had a kindness for the animal. So the trouble began. Now, we can only hope he will be delayed. If he finds his scoundrels dancing or practising the voodoo it may save us."

Nick asked how the mulatto had

known so precisely the conditions on Morne Loup.

Du Hamel shrugged his shoulders. "They have always spies around us. They know. And occasionally one of our *nègres* slips away at night. Isolated as we were, it was all we could do to hold our own. And last night we had but two barrels of powder left. We were desperate, my friend. Your coming was a gift from God—which is to say, let us trust it has been, for I should be grieved did your company share the fate planned for us."

Du Hamel's words were gracious, but there was a cold ruthlessness in his attitude as repellent to Nick Rawles as his fortitude seemed admirable. Indeed, as between du Hamel and Blaise, Nick was inclined to prefer the mulatto as a human being—he suspected that Blaise must have had excellent reasons for yielding to the call of his Negro blood. All the poor fellow had gained from his association with the white race had been the twin stigmas of illegitimacy and slavery. But it was scarcely the moment to hint as much to du Hamel, and Nick was secretly relieved to hear the burst of feeble cheers announcing the arrival of the Morne Loup refugees. They stumbled out of the jungle, a weary procession of scarecrows, each one burdened according to his strength, their joy at the prospect of deliverance so poignant as to bring tears to their rescuers' eyes.

"France! France!" they cried. "*Vive le Roi!*"

Cécile, carrying a baby in her arms, was leading the little column.

"Only conceive, Nick!" she exclaimed. "Here are forty women and children, who must have been shot by their own men in another week!"

"Get 'em in the boats," Nick answered mechanically. "Go with 'em yourself." She never looked at du Hamel, standing close by.

"Must I?" she asked softly.

"They need you," Nick said. "Here you'd be some one for us to worry about."

She nodded. "I have been selfish. Forgive—"

A rattle of drums drifted down the beach from eastward—not jungle drums; snare drums, beating a military march.

A sailor ran up, shouting: "'Tis sojers, Cap'n, sir, a sight of 'em."

And the Abbé, trotting back from his lookout-post, called: "*Messieurs,* you should see! They might be a battalion of Royal Auvergne."

Du Hamel laughed without mirth.

"They dress well, the *nègres,*" he said. "They fight the better for it. We'll be lucky, *mes amis,* if any of us have the chance to swim off; myself, I'd prefer to feed sharks than suffer their torments." He seemed to notice Cécile for the first time, and changed his tone, all courtliness. "I pray you, *mademoiselle,* do not be concerned. We shall thrash the *canaille.* Permit me to hand you into your seat."

She thanked him dully, but it was to Nick she spoke.

"What shall I say to the Chevalier, to Monsieur Harty?"

"Tell 'em we must count on the schooner's guns," he answered.

"Ah," spoke up du Hamel, "there my people can help. Even the women are accustomed to handling cannon."

The refugees disposed themselves in the three boats docilely, like people habituated to emergencies. Not a child whimpered. There were forty-three of them, including three men so old and weak they would have been encumbrances ashore. But they made a heavy load for the sailors to row—Nick kept with him Goss and four of his youngest men, which left but six oarsmen for the longboat and four each for the whaleboats—and their progress was necessarily sluggish. Still, with a moderate surf and a calm sea outside, they should have no difficulty in reaching the schooner, and Nick turned away from his task with a sense that it had been well done. He

regarded the situation ashore less optimistically.

De Vrissac had formed a double line across the beach, *émigrés* and sailors in front, refugees in rear. Beyond them, a quarter of a mile, perhaps, an imposing column was approaching—a long, snake-like column, bayonets glinting above black shakos and white uniforms. Ahead rode a tall officer, behind him a platoon of drummers who thumped a quickstep indefatigably.

There was discipline in that column, self confidence. It didn't matter that the faces under the shakos were black, that the white-gaitered shanks were unshod.

At the moment the Long Tom boomed from the schooner, and a solid shot slapped through the formation.

"*Bien,*" exclaimed du Hamel. "That's the stuff they don't like, *mon capitaine.*"

"But they have closed ranks," Nick pointed out, which was the truth.

"Yes, but give them plenty of it, and they'll waver," the Baron responded confidently. "The *nègres* can stand musketry, but cannon—that's a different matter."

A CARRONADE roared, and was short. A third shot was over, but a fourth ricocheted from the water, and hit the rear files. The Baron clapped his thigh.

"An artilleryman you have there!" he exclaimed. Nick stared at the tall officer on horseback, who rode along without turning his head, evidently confident that his subordinates could order the ranks.

"That will be Blaise?" asked the American.

Du Hamel gritted his teeth. "But yes. And you may leave the scoundrel to me. If I do nothing else—but let us put our people into action. The thing to do is to strike the *nègres* first; never give them first blow."

De Vrissac received the two cheerily. "I hope all is to your satisfaction, *mes amis? Bien!* Then we go forward? That is good. Me, I do not care for the sharp-shooting. The white arm is best, *hein?*"

And a stout cheer went up from the double line, less than one hundred and twenty in all—and four of them coal-black, Nick noticed. They advanced gayly, chaffing and joking together.

"I have an inclination to give the rascals my blessing," said the Abbé. "I have blessed the deer with this—" he exhibited a light Jaeger rifle—"but never men."

"Bless them, by all means," du Hamel responded with his mirthless laugh. And the Abbé stepped from the ranks, sighted and fired. The tall officer pitched from his horse, as the beast sank under him.

"Abbé," exclaimed the Baron, frowning darkly, "I could give you my curse —Ah, he is up again. That is good."

"But I did not intend to bless a horse," protested the Abbé, and the ranks burst into laughter.

Meantime the schooner's guns were firing methodically, and the beach in rear of the Haitian column was strewn with bodies. The drums changed their beat; the column halted and shifted smartly into company front. The officers ran out between the intervals, and took their places in front, Blaise, himself, three paces ahead of all. The crackling rhythm of the charge smote through the thunder of the big guns. The lines of bayonets lowered, and the black men took the trot, a hoarse cheering marking the pace of their advance.

Nick peered anxiously toward the schooner. This was the time for grape. And Harty and the Chevalier did not disappoint him. The next blast from the *True Federal's* battery was appallingly thunderous.

Double-shotted, Nick thought to himself. Hope they don't burst a gun. But the schooner was whole as the

smoke-cloud lifted above her tops, and the Haitian formation was temporarily shattered. That was Long Tom, Nick thought again. Wonder if the carronades can hold such a load? Two of them answered him, and the white-coated lines reeled back.

"EN AVANT!" screamed du Hamel. "Forward, all!"

They fired a volley and went forward with a rush. A scattering fire met them, and several dropped, but they struck the wavering Haitians with an impetus which sent the black men flying. Nick had a glimpse of Blaise in the smoke, waving his sword and trying to rally his men. Then the schooner fired again, and Nick raised his voice in a quarter deck bellow. "Halt! *Halté là!* We'll be under our own guns."

With de Vrissac and the Abbé to aid him, and some reluctant help from du Hamel, he succeeded finally in checking the whites and they withdrew far enough to give the schooner a free field of fire. He saw, with some disgust, that the refugees were calmly cutting the throats of the Haitian wounded.

"Is it necessary?" he asked du Hamel.

The Baron replied, with that horrible mirthless laugh: "It is merciful beside what they would do to us, *mon capitaine.*"

Blaise and his officers already had checked the flight and formed a heavy line of battle from the jungle's edge to the water—front rank prone, second rank kneeling, third rank standing, a compact reserve in rear of all. From this formation the Haitians opened a grilling fire by volleys, and the tables were roundly turned. Six men were hit at the first discharge, four at the second, and the whites retired slowly, carrying their wounded, while the schooner's guns boomed spasmodically.

"So far we do well, eh?" chuckled de Vrissac, fingering an ear a bullet had nicked. "Why, Abbé, what—"

The little old gentleman, still wearing his threadbare black, let the Jaeger rifle fall from his hands as the blood pumped from his mouth and he staggered, clutching at his chest. Nick caught him before he dropped, and he lay back in the American's arms.

"God receive my soul," he gasped. "I—have—sinned. Ah—" And then he cried in a loud voice: *"Vive le Roi!"* Nick lowered him gently.

"A good death," approved du Hamel, wiping the powder stains from his own face.

Another volley lashed them, and Nick realized the schooner's guns were quiet. He looked across the placid waters, glittering blue in the sunshine. The three boats were pulling around her stern. It would require several minutes for the transfer of their people over the bulwarks. For so long the shore party must be unsupported. Would this be apparent to Blaise? He shifted his gaze to the Haitians, and saw that the mulatto was no fool. The front ranks were rising; the reserve was advancing, a compact block of men, ready to deliver the final thrust if the whites were broken.

"We're in for it, gentlemen," he said calmly. "This time we must handle the blacks ourselves."

"Eh?" exclaimed du Hamel. "Ah, I perceive! *Bien!* If we must make an end, *messieurs,* let it be as good a one as Monsieur de L'Orme's. Fire at will, and aim low, I beg you. At the last we will counter-charge."

ALL his life afterward Nick Rawles could never remember consecutively the happenings of the next quarter-hour; but at times his nostrils would twitch to a ghostly stench of powder-smoke; he would feel the hot sun through his coat, the smart of sweat in his eyes, the pain in his left arm; and his ears would ring with the racket of musketry, the deep-throated cheering of white men,

the tenor yelping of the blacks. And then disjointed pictures would take shape before his eyes.

He would see again the clash of the two lines, the whites in a ragged V like an old Viking shield-wall, the blacks densely arrayed. He would feel the clash of the collision, men lifted momentarily off their feet as he was, hear the grunts and curses. And bayonets would flash and drip, and swords hack and thrust, and clubbed muskets swing in furious arcs. There would come to him, in memory, the exultation he had felt as the V of white men split the black-faced ranks. He'd see George Goss raging amongst the enemy, the incarnation of a Viking chief, a red-bladed boarding-ax in his fist. He'd see young de Vrissac, a smile on his handsome face, fencing off bayonets with a dress-sword as casually as though they were in a *salle d'armes*—"Hah, my Nick, a good coup, that!" He'd remember the sensation of nausea which had almost overpowered himself when a bayonet clicked on his shoulder blade, after ripping up his left arm from the biceps.

But clearest of all to him would be the picture of the two half-brothers, Georges, Baron du Hamel, and Blaise, the mulatto, each seeking out the other and again and again diverted by the shifting interplay of battle. He had encountered Blaise in the opening mêlée, had crossed blades with him; and he could never forget the quick smile on the mulatto's face, the dexterity with which he had disengaged, with a courteous inclination of the head, a half-heard: *"Non, m'sieu'."* And Blaise, as callously as his brother, had shoved a black sergeant in between them to take the point of Nick's cutlass and disappeared behind the heaving black line.

Du Hamel had raged into the Haitians with a ferocity that was frightening, wielding a musket until it was shattered to bits, then fighting point and edge with his hanger. No man stood before him. They cowered, screeching: *"C'est le Loup Blanc!"* Until the brothers met.

Nick was close by when it happened, and tried to force his way toward them, horrified by the cold hatred with which they engaged. He wasn't sure what he intended to do. Afterward, he realized, du Hamel would have cut him down had he tried to interfere. And he was handicapped by his left arm. But he reached them in time to see Blaise parry his brother's hanger, and run du Hamel through the heart. The glare faded from the mulatto's eyes as he recognized Nick.

"Ha, *m'sieu'*," he said. *"Rende'vous! C'est la victoi'."* He kicked his brother's prostrate body, and Nick, enraged, lashed out with his right fist at the mulatto's chin. Blaise tipped back on his heels, unconscious. Nick leaped astride him, shouting in his best jargon: *"C'est la victorie, nègres! Blaise est mort! Le commandant est mort!"* But as he shouted a refugee hacked off Blaise's head and tossed it into the Haitians' ranks, yelling: *"C'est le mulâtre! Le mulâtre est mort!"*

The Long Tom thundered from the schooner, masterfully laid by Harty, and a solid shot whistled through the Haitian reserve, just coming into action. Nick, scrambling to his feet, could actually see disintegration attack their ranks. A howl went up from hundreds of black throats: *"Nou' som' trahi'! Nou' som' trahi'!"* And they broke like a flock of startled sheep.

Emigrés and refugees pursued them, but Nick's one thought was to search for Blaise's head in the trampled sand. There was a look of peace on the bruised face when he found it. Nick called to Goss and the two of his men left alive, and bade them carry the body into the jungle. He was determined that it should suffer no indignity.

"That was a man, Mr. Goss," he said.

He had one more picture distinct in his memory. The boats were pulling inshore, oars lashing the water to foam.

The *True Federal* rode to her moorings, as peaceful in appearance as though she had never fired a gun. The French were streaming back from the pursuit. Goss came to him, panting a bit.

"We done it, Cap'n. 'Won't nobody find him, I guess. But beggin' your pardon, what are we goin' to do with our own people? I figger there's twenty-five to thirty white men won't need their skillets again. And we ain't got time to bury 'em, sir. There may be more blacks 'roundabouts—and they can fight, sir. I won't never say they can't ag'in." Nick's eyes chanced upon a keg of powder which had been left ashore.

"Put 'em all in the jungle," he said. "It's green, but the keg will fire it. Thanks, Mister."

The next thing he knew—and this picture never left his memory—he was lying in the stern sheets of the longboat, with his head on Cécile's knees. He saw that she was weeping.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I would have saved him, Cécile—if I could." She bent and kissed his forehead.

"Foolish one," she said. "I do not weep for *him*. I weep for you, my Nick, and for those brave ones we have left behind." She hesitated. "For him, my Nick, I think it is better so. He—he would never have been happy—for me or any other." She added simply: "I knew when I first saw him."

There was a smell of burning in the air, and he raised himself with her help and looked back at the shore. All along the beach the jungle was aflame. The smoke was billowing upwards to the summit of Morne Loup, where the Lilies still floated from their staff. But as he looked, it eddied higher, higher, and the golden-spattered flag was hidden from sight. It had been there—and it was gone.

THE arrival of the *True Federal* was a nine days' wonder in Philadelphia, and not very much later a notice appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette:*

Captain Nicholas Rawles, of the schooner *True Federal*, who, our readers will recall, arrived recently at this port with upwards of one hundred French refugees he had rescued from Haiti, was married yesterday in St. Timothy's to Mademoiselle la Comptesse de Beauregard, daughter of the late Duc and Duchesse de Beauregard, who perished in the Terror. The bride was given in marriage by her second cousin, the Marquis de Vrissac, her only surviving male relative, and the happy couple were attended by a guard of honor furnished by a detachment of the schooner's crew and a representative group of local émigrés. Later they were received by the President and Madame Washington, and after a suitable collation were escorted by a considerable group of friends to Price's Wharf, whence they sailed in the *True Federal*, for a voyage to the East Indies. The good wishes of all loyal citizens attend them.

SON OF A GUN-CURSE

By Luke Short

THE BAR STIRRUP was a spread people left alone. There was no reason why they shouldn't, for big Clay Avery and his kid brother Morg were peaceful enough, and between them didn't run more than a hundred head of cattle.

But the Averys were practically strangers. Six years ago, big Sam Avery, the father, had drifted in from New Mexico, broke, with his wife and two sons. He bought the Bar Stirrup nestling in the breaks of the Kiowa River. His first sizable herd he had driven himself over to Magaffey to the railroad—and he had been killed.

No one knew why. No one knew how, for Magaffey was far away and Sam was alone.

The next year his wife died, and the two sons took over. They were quiet folks, and their ranch was in a remote part of the county. But it had a neat log house on it, and was as prosperous looking as a spread can be when there is no money to spend on it.

Clay, twenty-three, was a tall, dark, somber man, tactiturn as the whole Avery family had been. Morgan was eighteen, dark too, but his blue eyes had a kind of wild fire in them that seemed strange when you knew him. For Morg was shy, quieter than his brother, and he hated guns, hated killing animals, even hated branding them.

That's why the day Clay got the new gun in Kiowa Wells and showed it to

Morg late that evening, Morg looked queerly at him.

"We got enough guns, Clay."

"Guns?" Clay said, grinning. "You mean gun. We got one. We need a new rifle." He tousled Morg's hair with affectionate roughness. "I'm goin' to teach you to shoot this one, younker."

"Not me," Morg said, and turned away.

Clay lay awake that night, thinking. Next morning, after breakfast, when work was divided for the day, Clay let Morg leave the spread first. Then he saddled his roan, and followed, careful to keep out of sight. He tracked Morg through the breaks for a good five miles.

When he heard shots, many of them, he did not hurry, for he thought he knew what they were. He dismounted just below a hump of a ridge and worked his way to the top, so that he could look through the screening brush down into the hollow below.

There, down in a flat, grassy park between a hogsback and the ridge, was Morg.

He was facing a huge dead cottonwood. Low on his thighs were two Colts, tied down. He would stand erect, place a silver dollar on the wrist of his outstretched right arm, then suddenly streak for his gun. His Colt would be empty before the dollar hit the ground, and then he would walk over to the cottonwood and see how his slugs were grouped. Time after time, patiently, doggedly, he did it, until it seemed to Clay, watching him, that he was satisfied.

Then he would whirl and shoot, fall and shoot, shoot while falling, shoot while running, shoot with the sun in his eyes, shoot lying down. For an hour Clay watched him, breathless.

"That little devil," he swore softly. "I knew when he said guns, instead of gun, he was hidin' somethin' from me."

He watched a while longer, then mused:

"The kid's a gunman. Lordy, but that draw's a whisper. Wait'll I see him tonight."

He watched until Morg was through, had wrapped his Colts in an oiled cloth, and cached them behind a rock over near the river. Then Clay left, chuckling softly, but wondering, too.

When Morg forked his stocky pinto, he aimed to settle down to the business of the day, which was to comb these near breaks for five head of cattle that had been missing a week.

He climbed the same ridge behind which Clay had hidden. And just over the hump, he ran onto Clay's tracks. He studied them, then dismounted and backtracked to where Clay had mounted his horse and ridden off.

"Clay," Morg said slowly. Then Clay had seen the six-gun practice. Tonight, there would be questions that couldn't be answered. Even if they were answered, it would lead to endless argument.

"Then I'll light a shuck today," Morg said grimly. "It's about time, anyway."

He rode back to the shack, got out a piece of paper and scribbled a short note.

> Clay:
>
> You saw me this morning. I'm heading for Magaffey and I reckon you know why. Follow me if you want, but don't try to stop me.
>
> —Morg.

He took two pounds of jerky, some coffee, two blankets and some matches and left, picking up the two six-guns at the rock and strapping them on.

By nightfall, he was out of the county.

MAGAFFEY was an ugly, sleepy, windswept cowtown most of the year.

The rest of the time it was a roaring, booming, frontier hell-town so wild that no law or law-man could tame it. The day the first trail herd arrived

from Texas and bedded on the deep grass of the range around the town, Magaffey opened up. Saddle-stiff, trail-hardened Texans took it over lock, stock, and barrel. Whisky flowed like water; fortunes passed over the gaming tables; and the six-gun was king.

It was grudge time. The Texans were southerners, still smarting under the defeat of the Confederate cause. And here they were, hundreds strong, in a state that had supported the Union. Every man of them had a roll, and a thirst that had been sweated into him along a thousand miles of the dusty, cattle-scarred Chisholm Trail. They had come from a feud-shot country where gunmen were hired by the big ranches to protect their interests. In Texas they quarreled among themselves like so many wildcats and when they came to Magaffey it was no different. Hating each other and hating the Northerners, they brought little peace to Magaffey at shipping time.

Day after day, the herds arrived, thousand strong, to wait their turn at shipping. And while they waited, the punchers would ride into town, six-guns drowning out their wild yells for liquor and women and gambling.

It was into this that Morg, eighteen, a Northerner, with two untried Colts at his hips, rode late one evening. He had been warned along the trail about Magaffey, so he was not surprised when he turned into the feed stable, dismounted, and looked out on the single street of the town. The hotel was lighted from top to bottom, and the saloons were running wide open. The street was crowded, and it seemed to him as if a mad mob was continually shuttling in the canyon of the street between the false-front stores.

"A big time," the stable boy said wearily, as he took Morg's horse.

"Ain't it though?"

"But wait'll that Star Eighty-eight outfit blows in tonight," the boy said and whistled softly. "Colonel Star's outfit. They're wilder'n all six storeys of Hell, mister. They got in this evenin' and as soon as their stuff is bedded down, they'll be in. Then watch out!"

Morg grinned and stepped out onto the board walk. He was hungry, but first he wanted to ask a few questions, to learn some things.

The marshal's office was on a corner, a board shack with a small, brick jail behind it. There was a light in the office as Morg picked his way through the throng, but as he approached it was blown out.

At the door, he met a man coming out.

"Marshal?" Morg asked politely.

The man was locking the door, but he whirled at the sound of Morg's voice and his hand dropped to his gun.

"Yeah," he said cautiously. He was a heavy man, middle-aged, with a broad, kindly face that looked harried now in the half light of the town.

"I'd like to see you a minute."

"Trouble?"

Morg grinned. "No, sir. Not a bit."

"Come in, then," the marshal said and opened the door. When the lamp was lighted again, he motioned Morg to a seat and sat on the edge of the desk.

"Was you marshal here about five years ago?" Morg began.

The man shook his head. "Huh-uh. The man that can stay marshal three years in this town ain't been born yet," he said grimly.

"Who was?"

"Clint Hoffman. He's dead. Why?"

"I'm tryin' to trace a man that disappeared here about five years ago," Morg said, looking the marshal in the eye. "Who'd know?"

"What was his name?"

Morg said: "Sam Avery. Folks called him Big Sam. Ever hear of him?"

The marshal nodded. "From Mexico, huh? Sure I knew him."

"What happened to him?" Morg asked quietly.

The marshal laughed shortly. "He's dead. He was killed here in a brawl."

Morg waited a little before he asked his next question, then he said: "Ever hear who done it?"

"Cotton Cane," the marshal said bluntly. "Colonel Star's fore—say, who are you?"

"Never mind," Morg said quietly. "The Star Eighty-eight foreman, you say?"

The marshal looked Morg over with a coolly appraising eye, then said: "Uh-huh."

"What was the fight over? Ever hear?"

"Avery had a little bunch of steers that was scheduled to be loaded before the Star Eighty-eight stuff. Cane got in trouble here in town and wanted to hightail it. He tried to cut in ahead of Big Sam because he'd have to wait another day for more cars. Sam called him on it right over there at the pens. Cane had a bunch of them Texan gunies with him for witnesses, so the story goes. He never argued with Sam, but just cut down on him. Avery never had a chance."

Morg rose, and thanked him, but the marshal put out a hand to detain him.

"You ain't aimin' to make fight talk with Cane, are you, son? Hell, I can't stop you, of course, but I can give you advice. Don't do it. He's a killer, that ranahan—the toughest, meanest, quickest, fightinest gunman in that whole damned Tehanner bunch. Stay away from him."

"Thanks," Morg said evenly, and bid the marshal good night.

OUTSIDE on the walk, he squared his shoulders and turned up the street. First thing to do, he knew, was to eat, since the Star Eighty-eight outfit wasn't in town.

He turned in at the Paradise Café and ordered a big meal from a girl behind the counter who left off reading a book to come wait on him. Although everything else in the town seemed crowded, the café was deserted now, except for Morg.

The girl was young, pretty, with hair the color of taffy, and a pleasant mouth which always seemed to be on the verge of smiling. Morg blushed a little when he gave his order, for in Kiowa Wells the café was run by a dirty Mexican who was more used to curses than kind words.

"Ham and eggs, french fries, hot biscuit, apple pie and—"

His words were suddenly drowned by a thunder and yelling on the street. He turned to look outside, when the girl yelled:

"Look out!"

At the same instant, the window up front splintered with a crash and five slugs bedded in the wall by the kitchen door.

The girl raised up from behind the counter and grinned. The thunder swept on down the street.

"The Star Eighty-eight outfit," she explained, laughing breathlessly. "That's part of their fun—to break all the whole windows in town when they ride in."

"Do they ever hit anyone?" Morg asked curiously.

She nodded. "They hit a man last year, sitting just about where you are."

Morg said nothing and the girl went back to the kitchen. He wondered just how a man went about hunting down and killing the coyote that murdered his father. Cane would likely be in that outfit headed for one of the saloons. Should he walk in and tell him to make his play?

Just then, the door slammed open and three tall dusty punchers strode in, slapping the dust off their levis with Stetsons.

They were all blue-eyed men, tall, with blonde hair, wearing worn Colts at their hips and finely tooled half-boots and black Stetsons.

They sat down two chairs away from Morg and immediately rapped on the counter.

The girl came hurrying out, and stood before them, smiling.

"Howdy, Miss," one man said pleasantly. "What have we got to eat?"

The girl told him, and they ordered.

Morg's food was brought in, and he set about eating, aware that he was being watched by all three punchers.

When the girl brought in their food, Morg heard one of them say:

"I thought this heah place was a rest'runt."

"It is," the girl said.

"How come you let kids in that ain't even dry behind the ears yet? It ain't a nursery, is it?"

"Who do you mean?" the girl said flushingly, and for answer the man pointed with a fork toward Morg.

Morg looked up and put down his fork.

"They let anybody in here, Mister—just anybody, includin' a stuffed Stetson, now and then."

Slowly, the middle puncher slid off his seat and walked over to Morg.

"Wheah I come from," he drawled coldly, "we neveh talk thataway less'n we can back it up."

"And where I come from," Morg said, "we dont talk *that* way 'less we want a fight."

"You want one, then?" the puncher drawled, but his eyes had given ample warning.

Morg's left hand whipped his gun up across his belly and it settled in the crook of his right elbow before the Texan's guns had cleared leather.

"Well?" Morg said, fighting down his exultation. He *had* matched this ranny and beat him to the draw. "Looks like you don't want one very bad, Mister."

The Texan let his gun slide back in the holster and drew his hand belt high. His face was flushed and Morg could hear his angry breathing.

"And wheah I come from, we ain't so spooky we eat with a gun on our laps, neither," he sneered.

"Maybe you better do it after this," Morg said, then his voice lost all its good humor. "Go sit down, *hombre*. You give me a headache—a big, wide, woolly headache."

As he finished, the door opened and five men trooped into the room. The puncher, rather than be caught in a ridiculous position, turned and walked back to his friends, and Morg holstered his gun. He finished his meal and paid his check, then sauntered past the Texans. The middle puncher half turned as he passed.

"I'll see you lateh, salty fellah. This ain't finished."

"Any time," Morg drawled carelessly, "Any time."

On the street again, Morg turned toward the feed stable. He had thought all this out on the trail, and he figured that if luck was with him, it would work. He was going to drift into Magaffey and stay there until he uncovered some trace of the man who killed his father. Then he would have his horse saddled, and ready for flight. The county line was seven miles due west over country as flat as a board. When he found the man who killed his father, he was going to pick a quarrel with him, kill him if he could, then ride out of town and the county. It was simple, and demanded only a cool nerve to execute.

For four long years, ever since he was fourteen and first understood what it meant to be fatherless and motherless, Morg had sworn that things would be settled this way. He had never mentioned Magaffey or his father's death to Clay. He had pretended all this time that he wasn't interested in guns, in killing, in gun play and violence, and his pose had seemed genuine to Clay, who thought it was a natural attitude for a kid whose dad had died with a gun in his hand.

But the first money Morg ever earned was hoarded until he had enough to buy a pair of worn Colts and a belt from a Mexican in Kiowa Wells. For one solid year until he was sixteen, he had practised drawing those empty guns, practised until the movement was automatic and swift as only a half-grown boy's movements can be.

Then he began buying shells, and trying for aim and accuracy. Two years had been spent that way. Hours out of every morning when he was away from Clay had been spent in dull, dogged routine.

And each day, each hour he practised, he remembered Magaffey and his father. The trail drive was an annual affair, and each year somewhere in that gang from Texas was the man who had downed Sam Avery. He was there unless he'd been killed, Morg knew.

And now, it seemed as if things were going to turn out as he had planned. Cane was the man who killed his Dad and Cane was alive and might be in town tonight. Moreover, Morg had had a chance to test his gun skill before that blustery puncher. He hadn't felt afraid. His hands were not trembling, and the same, swift precision in whipping out his gun had stuck with him when his life depended on it.

SO BE it. He was ready.

At the feed stable, he encountered again the same stable boy.

"Horse fed?" he asked.

"And watered," the youngster grinned. "Takin' him out?"

"Not right away. But have him saddled, will you?"

The youngster grinned knowingly and turned to go, when Morg stopped him.

"Was that the Star Eighty-eight outfit just rode in a while back?"

"Uh-huh. Don't them jaspers sound peaceful?"

"Who's roddin' the outfit now?" Morg asked carelessly.

"The ramrod's Cotton Cane. Big feller, with the blondest hair you ever seen. Good looking, always smiling—but he's plain poison. He'll kill a man with a smile on his face, the coyote, and love it."

"Where does he hang out?"

"Bon Ton, generally."

Morg thanked him. As he stepped out the door, he heard a fusillade of shots, and the throngs on the street stopped and looked toward the Palace saloon. Some of them moved across the street, drawn by curiosity, but most of them went their way. Just another gunfight.

The Bon Ton when Morg entered was jamb-packed with punchers, drinking and arguing and gambling. And to Morg, all the speech he heard seemed slow and drawling, and the men around him somehow different from the men of his country. Aside from their lean, tanned faces, their dust-reddened eyes, their dusty clothes, they had an indolence in their movements that he quickly saw was deceptive. Every man of them wore guns. Some, too, had eyes as hard and cold as agate, and these men generally took their drinks lounging with their backs to the wall. They were usually well dressed, with clean, gaudy clothes and bandanas, and many of them wore gloves. Their eyes seemed never to rest as they talked with companions, nodding and conversing but still watching the room.

Against a backtilted chair by a sidewall sat the marshal watching a poker game. He seemed alone, for no one spoke to him except occasionally the houseman at the poker table.

As Morg passed the bar, he heard two punchers rawhiding the bartender, who was working in grim-lipped silence.

Morg worked his way back through the crowd. Of a house-man he asked:

"Is Cotton Cane here tonight?"

The house-man stopped short and stared at him. "Yeah. In a back room. Want to see him?"

"I'll wait, thanks," Morg replied.

He strolled over to a wall bench and sat down, watching the crowd but especially the two doors in the rear of the room, at which the house-man had gestured. Two crowded faro tables were running near the doors, but Morg picked a seat so he could keep an eye on them.

In the half hour he waited there were several noisy arguments at the bar. Two of the parties stepped out into the street, and before the marshal could make his way through the crowd, there was shooting. Morg never found out what it was about, nor what had happened.

When he saw the rear door open, and a man step out, Morg leaned forward a little. Surely, this man was Cotton Cane. There was no mistaking him.

He was a giant of a man, with a clean, bold profile. He carried a black Stetson in his hand, so that his head was uncovered. His hair was thick and wavy, and many shades lighter than the deep tan of his face. It appeared almost white as he stood talking to a companion in the doorway. He wore a black suit of broadcloth and a white shirt, with string tie. He looked more a prosperous rancher than a foreman.

In a moment, he came forward to the bar, stopping to greet men every few steps. Five other men trailed behind him, all ranchers, by their look.

Morg's heart balled up in his throat. This man didn't look a killer, but he was. Perhaps those huge ivory handled Colts with the silver studded shell belt and the tooled leather holsters had been the same guns that downed Sam Avery and bluffed the witnesses into keeping their secret.

When Cane elbowed his way to the bar, Morg got up, and threaded his slow way there, too. By dint of persistence, Morg got a place at the bar by Cane, and he ordered a whisky. When Cane heard him order, he looked over at him, nodded pleasantly, and continued his conversation with the man next him.

Morg waited until Cane's whisky was set before him and Cane reached out and picked it up, then he jogged Cane's arm violently.

The whisky slopped over and the glass crashed to the bar.

Slowly, Cane turned around, a smile on his face.

"Crowded, ain't it?" he asked pleasantly, and before Morg could answer, he said to the bartender: "Another."

Morg laid a hand on Cane's arm and the big man turned.

"Ever happen to know Sam Avery?" Morg asked slowly.

Cane observed him a moment with inscrutable eyes, then said: "Yes. What about him, son?"

The bartender set the bottle in front of Cane at that moment, and Morg reached out and poured some whisky into a glass. Then he picked up the glass and tossed the contents casually, insolently, into Cane's face.

"I'm his son," he announced quietly.

Punchers along the bar dived for safety as Morg stepped a little away from the bar. Slowly, Cane wiped his face with a sleeve, a cold, murderous smile on his lips.

"*Cane!*" a voice whipped out from the loose circle of men, and the marshal elbowed his way through to the cleared space between Cane and Morg. His guns were out, and he covered both of them.

"Leave those guns in leather, both of you!" he commanded.

"Knight," Cane said to him, his voice thick and slow. "I don't aim to take that from any one—not even a kid."

"There'll be no gun play here," the marshal said grimly. "Not if I have to cut down on you both."

Cane laughed harshly, looking at Morg, who was standing ten feet from him, hands at his side, little dancing lights in his eyes.

Some one in the crowd lunged at the marshal, pinning his arms to his sides and knocking his guns down.

"Go ahead, Cotton," the man grunted as he wrestled with the marshal.

"*Just stay put!*" a voice ordered from the door. The whole room turned to look. There was Clay, his face dusty and sweat-streaked, guns covering the room, standing in the door. Not a man moved, but the marshal was not freed.

"Morg, come out of that!" Clay commanded.

Morg did not even turn, but said to Cane: "Make your play, whippoorwill."

"You do and I'll cut you to doll rags, Mister," Clay said.

"Wait," the marshal cut in. "Go across the bridge and fight. Outside of town. Settle it any way you want, only no gun play in town."

"That suits me," Morg said.

"How about you, Cane?" the marshal asked.

Cane nodded, the cold smile still on his face.

"Then leather them guns, you in the door," the marshal ordered.

"Morg, you gone crazy?" Clay plead.

"I made this fight," Morg said. "I'll finish it. Leather them guns, Clay."

"Better do it, Mister," the marshal said. "The kid won't go, and if you try to make him you'll have this whole gang to fight. Think."

Clay cursed bitterly. "All right then. You"—he spoke to the man holding the marshal—"let the law loose, and he'll see there's a square deal given. He *better* see to it."

The marshal was freed and he turned to the crowd.

"Meet over on the other side of the bridge in ten minutes. The man that wins rides out of the country a free man. That right?"

"That's right," Cane said flatly. "Remember that, Knight, after I've downed him, or we'll make you remember it if it takes all of Texas to do it. When it's over, I ride into this town a free man."

MORG turned and joined Clay, and, along with the marshal, they stepped out onto the walk. Instantly, the bar room was filled with the excitement of talking. The Texans, whether they liked Cane or not, considered Morg's challenge an insult to their honor. Immediately, it became a contest, all the Texans on one side, Morg and the townsmen on the other.

"Well, you damned little fool!" Clay said when they were outside. His eyes searched Morg's face. "Do you know what you've done?"

Morg nodded, and the marshal looked at him too.

"You've never been in a gunfight in your life," Clay said, cursing bitterly.

"I'll down him," Morg said grimly. He looked bleakly at Clay. "That's the jasper that killed Dad, Clay."

Clay stopped, and stared at Morg. "How do you know?"

Morg gestured to the marshal. "Ask him if that's the ranny that killed Big Sam Avery over in the stock pens."

The marshal, weary and powerless to help, told Clay what he had told Morg. Clay's face was strained, when he heard it all.

"Why didn't you wait for me, you jughead?" he asked Morg. "You knew I'd follow you. It's my fight as much as it is yours."

"Maybe you'll have the chance yet," Morg said, and smiled a little.

At the feed stable, they got their horses and led them down the street to the bridge. It seemed as if every one in town was streaming toward the bridge, for news of the gun-fight had spread like a prairie fire. Cane, the Star Eighty-eight ramrod, was going to down a glory-hunting kid, with the marshal looking on.

A big bonfire had been built just across the river close to the bridge. As they were crossing the bridge leading their horses, the marshal looked over

the crowd. What few horses there were had been left to the rear of the crowd.

"Look here, son," the marshal said, his voice low. "You two leave your horses right on the river bank, plumb on the edge. If you down this Cane, all hell's goin' to break loose there. If you're lucky and you do nail him, make for your horse, and ride down into the river. There ain't but a couple inches of water there, and it's dark, so you won't be seen. Then ride up river 'round the bend, and ride till you come to where the alley opens up. Go up the other bank, ride through town by that alley, and then get clear the hell out of the country."

"Thanks, marshal," Clay said. "We'll do that—if Morg is lucky."

Following Knight's instructions, they groundhaltered their horses on the river bank, eighty feet or so from the fire.

Cane's men were grouped around him, and all the rest of the spectators stretched in a long line, leaving a wide space between themselves and the bonfire.

The marshal beckoned Cane over to him, where they stood by the fire.

"How many guns, Cane?" he asked.

"Two," Morg put in quickly.

"Suits me," Cane said.

"You'll stand a short ways apart, hands over your heads," the marshal said. "Go for your guns when I shoot. That all right?"

Cane nodded, and so did Morg.

"Then get ready," the marshal said.

Morg looked at Clay, whose face was gray.

"If he gets you, kid," Clay said, "I'll down him in the next second."

"He won't," Morg said.

Cane strode over to his position at the other side of the fire. The river, the bonfire, Cane and Morg facing each other, and the crowd off to one side all paused, waiting.

Cane turned his big body to Morg and spread his feet a little. Morg had seen that Cane carried a gun in a shoulder holster, and this was the one he would go for, probably, since it was closer than the guns at his hips. There was a cold, secret smile on Cane's face.

"Raise your hands!" the marshal ordered, raised his gun over his head.

The light of the bonfire brought both figures into clear relief, as they raised their hands. Cane was a magnificent man as he stood there, powerful, confident, a battle-tested gunfighter whose name was enough to awe most men, even those in his own country. Facing his great, majestic figure, Morg looked younger than he was in his rough range clothes. His thin face was set. It would be his first gun-fight, his first chance to see if all those years of practice by the cottonwood had been enough.

As he looked at Cane, he seemed to see that big dead cottonwood instead of the man.

Crash! went the signal gun.

Morg's fingers splayed a little and when his hands reached their downswing, they snapped up with electric tenseness, a bright, tight, flashing arc of metal that settled at his hipbones and exploded in duet. His eyes on Cane's chest, he fanned the guns empty in one long roar.

The first slug caught Cane's hand inside his coat and it smashed his arm as it drove into his chest. Inch by fast inch the others drove him one whole step back. He opened his eyes wide, and his jaw sagged, then the agony flooded over his face. He coughed once, and blood came. Then his right knee buckled, he turned, pitched on his side, then rolled over on his back.

There was a long two-second wait, then a roar rose from the crowd.

The marshal whirled on the spectators, both guns out.

"Go on!" he rasped at Morg.

And Morg ran for his horse.

Even as he leaned into the saddle beside Clay, some one yelled:

"Knight's a *town* marshal. Nail that

kid! Don't let him get away!"

Morg rowelled his paint off the edge of the bank, just as the slugs from the first blast of gunfire sung past his ear.

They hit the water and the welcome blackness of the creek bottom just as the angry shout of the mob drowned the splash.

Clay was ahead, riding like mad under the bridge, Morg behind him. Downstream a hundred yards, Morg looked back to see the bridge choked with the crowd. Horsemen were trying to fight their way through the mob and not succeeding.

They swung up the far bank, out of sight around the bend, swung into the alley that ran clear through the town, and were soon pounding out into open country.

They rode miles before they pulled up to breathe their horses and listen. Only the heaving of the winded horses and the whisper of the wind in the grass came to their ears.

"Lord," Clay said huskily. "Kid, you done it."

Morg unbuckled his gun belt and tossed it off into the brush.

"Remember, Clay," he said quietly. "Dad always said the best gunfighter is the jasper that knows when not to fight?"

Clay nodded.

"Then keep all this quiet," Morg said slowly. "We're ranchers, Clay, not killers."

Clay nodded and they swung off into the night again, as Morg said:

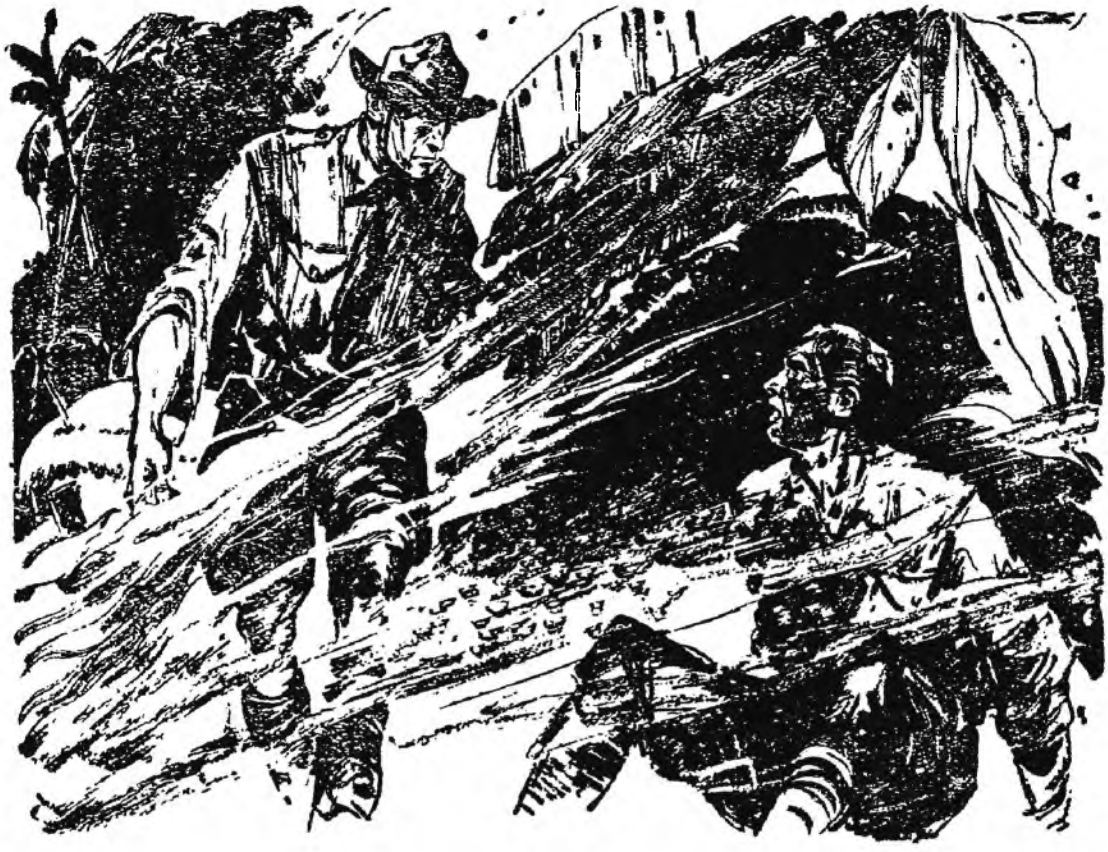
"Now where do you reckon them five head are hidin' in the breaks?"

HE WALKS AT NIGHT

AMERICAN BLACK BEAR

The black bear of North America is found in practically all wooded regions, where owing to its rather nocturnal habits and clever ways it manages to exist in the neighborhood of man in good numbers. It is often killed within a few miles of New York City in the hills of northern New Jersey and in the southern Catskills. It eats everything that comes to hand, from grubs, berries and vegetable foods to sheep, calves and pigs. When desperately hungry after hibernation it has been known to kill moose, deer and grown cattle and horses. The gait is the shuffling walk of all bears, with the usual awkward gallop when in a hurry. It is not dangerous to man except in very exceptional circumstances.

Lynn Bogue Hunt.



BEYOND KOONA VILLAGE

By Lieutenant William Chamberlain

IT was a grand song that they sang. A fighting man's song, filled with the *clump-thud* of marching feet.

The regiment was driving down the trail toward the sea again with the trees sliding past in the hot sunlight and the cactus splashed green against the lava hills. Arms swinging and gun slings a-creak and twelve hundred hob-nailed boots stamping down together. And the song was lifting—thundering up above the saffron dust of the July afternoon.

"Damn, damn, *damn* the *insurrectos!*"

A song of the days of the Empire; of battles at dawn and the sweat of the midday jungle and the red smudged camp-fires of a hundred bivouacs.

"Pock-marked, shifty-eyed, *ladrone!*"

A tough and bawdy song, such as fighting men sing. A song which boiled up through the heat and dust of the afternoon in boisterous acclaim to other fighting men who slept in the shallow graves of Caloocan and Balangiga and along the Old North Line. A song so that those older ones, watching from beyond the curtain, might know that the regiment doesn't forget its own.

"Under . . . . *neath* the starry *flag!*
We'll civ . . . . ilize 'em with a Krag!"

Dennis Silver, marching beside his company, listened to the song and found it good. The fourth generation of the Silver clan—and the Silvers were born with the crash of a marching song in their ears and the *clump-thud* of marching feet in their veins.

So Dennis Silver threw back his head

and sang with the rest while the regiment swung along and the July sunshine flowed down toward a scarlet sunset. And, behind Dennis Silver, the brown faces of his men grinned through dusty masks while the song boiled up into the waiting dusk.

Of them all there was only Steve Menkilvich who didn't sing. Big Steve, with his white, doughy face and the hunted fear in his eyes.

BIG Steve Menkilvich was twenty-nine—a great lump of a man who didn't understand and so was afraid. Slum-whelped and gutter-raised, a soldier because some careless recruiting sergeant had been eager to get his quota of enlistments. Steve Menkilvich had been in the outfit seven months now and he was still the hopeless misfit which he had been the day he joined.

The rest of the outfit didn't understand Steve Menkilvich and, because they didn't understand, they rode him in barracks with soldier wit which was as pointed and brutal as barbed wire. On the few occasions when he had dared to snarl back at them they had laughed and ridden him the harder. They didn't understand that Recruit Menkilvich, who had no home, was homesick. They didn't understand that he was afraid; afraid of the discipline which held him like the iron bars of a cell; afraid of his officers and his rifle and the dark hours of sentry-go and the laughter of the other seven men in his squad.

Even if they *had* known, those others couldn't have understood the sweating nights when Recruit Menkilvich lay sleepless on his cot, shivering and wishing that the daylight would not come. Some men are that way.

First Sergeant Calvin, a grim old man with the scars of forgotten battles across his face, had come into the orderly room. He stood in front of Dennis Silver's desk and saluted with the ease of long practice. Dennis Silver scrawled his initials across the sick report and then looked up.

"What is it, Calvin?"

"Sir, it's this recruit, Menkilvich, again. I called in Corporal Lane, who's in charge of that squad, an' I questioned him careful. He reports that yesterday he gave Menkilvich direct orders tuh get his stuff cleaned up for inspection. Th' other men in th' squadroom say that Menkilvich lay on his bunk all yesterday afternoon an' evening—an' you saw how he turned out for inspection this morning, sir."

The first sergeant scowled at the pad in his hand while Dennis Silver waited.

"Rifle—bore dirty, excess oil in chamber, rust on floor plate an' trigger guard, sling frogs tarnished. Shoes not shined. No haircut. Button off blouse. . . ."

Dennis Silver interrupted slowly, "This is the third time in a month that he's been reported, Calvin. What's wrong?"

"I don't know, Lootenant. I wish tuh God I did." Sergeant Calvin's voice was grim. "I've had him in th' orderly room an' I've talked to him nice. He won't talk. I've give him hell for bein' such a disgrace to th' outfit and sometimes he looks as if he was goin' tuh cry and sometimes he just looks dumb. I've seen a lot of recruits, Lootenant, but he's th' worst of th' lot."

"Get me his service record," Dennis Silver ordered thoughtfully, "and send him in when I ring, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

There was a typewriter in the outer office and it clattered on with a remorseless drum of sound; a bugle was blowing recall from morning drill. Outside the office window a hot wind rustled through dusty palm fronds. Dennis Silver shrugged his shoulders and picked up the narrow, paper-bound booklet which held the story of the seven months during which Menkilvich, Steve, Private,

L-1770689, had served in the Armies of the United States.

Dennis Silver scowled a little as he flipped over the crisp pages. He crushed his half smoked cigarette into an ash tray and whistled tunelessly while he read.

Born—Brooklyn, N. Y.
Date of Birth—December 11, 1905
Nationality of Parents—Unknown

A clerk had misspelled "Unknown" and had lined it out, made a careless correction. Personal entries about Recruit Steve Menkilvich—made impersonally and on a typrewriter whose "e" was slewed around at a rakish angle.

Name of Nearest Relative—None.
Person to Be Notified in Event of Emergency—None.
Grammar School—Fifth Grade.
High School—None.
College or University—None.
Occupation—Laborer. . . . . .

Blank sheets, then. Spaces for data as to previous service and promotions; facts as to whether or not Recruit Menkilvich had been vaccinated for smallpox and innoculated for typhoid fever; dates on which he had been fitted for shoes and a gas mask and had had the Articles of War read to him. Interesting data—but little help toward understanding why Steve Menkilvich was the worst soldier in the company.

Dennis Silver turned on and stopped at a page which bore the title, "Record of Trials By Court-Martial." There was much fine writing here.

. . . . . AWOL for three days—to forfeit ten dollars ($10.00) of his pay . . . . . absent from guard mount . . . . . walking post improperly as a sentinel—to forfeit . . . . . .

A long list of them. And yet there was no answer, even in those carefully written entries, as to why Recruit Steve Menkilvich should lie awake on his cot and count the minutes as they went by. Dennis Silver leaned back in his chair and thought for a long while. Then he reached out a brown hand and jabbed at the bell on his desk.

First Sergeant Calvin rapped sharply, came in with his punctilious salute. He stepped a little to one side and pulled Recruit Menkilvich forward with a curt jerk of his head.

"Put your heels together. Salute th' company commander like yuh been taught. Now report."

A sloppy salute, with none of the pride of a soldier in it. A mumbled and indistinct report which stirred Recruit Steve Menkilvich's flabby lips for a moment and then allowed his face to drop back into its doughy mask.

"Sir. . . . . enkilvich. . . . . s'ordered. . . . . First Sergint. . . ."

"You can go, Calvin," Dennis Silver said.

THE door closed again behind the first sergeant's stiff back, outside, the typewriter still jangled on. Dennis Silver spilled brown crumbs of tobacco into a paper and folded a cigarette between skilled fingers while he looked at the man in front of him. Menkilvich stood there with his big hands dangling limply at the end of their wrists—his eyes on the floor.

"Sit down," Dennis Silver said presently. "Over there—in that chair, Menkilvich."

He spoke gently, as one might speak to a backward child.

The big man slumped on the edge of the seat and the sunlight fell across his rumpled khaki and the colorless hair which drooped in front of his eyes. Dennis Silver watched him with eyes which saw a great deal and told nothing.

"You haven't been getting along so well in this outfit, have you, Menkilvich?"

"I been gettin' along . . . . all right."

A thick voice—heavy like the face behind it.

"A soldier says 'sir,' Menkilvich," Dennis Silver told him gently. "The outfit's not much like Brooklyn, is it? You sort of miss Brooklyn?"

"I wisht I was back. . . . . sir."

Dennis Silver smiled a little.

"That's better, Menkilvich. You miss the El, eh, and the boats going up and down the river. Got a girl back there?"

"I never had a girl, sir."

"Didn't ever take a girl to Coney Island or on an excursion up the Hudson? I'll bet you did, Menkilvich."

Soft words—such as one might speak to a child. Big Steve Menkilvich shifted uneasily, but he lifted his eyes for a moment and there was the faintest trace of a spark of animation in them—like a coal stirred up in a heap of dead ashes. He twisted at a tarnished button with one of his big, loose hands.

"I went tuh Coney once . . . . sir." His voice was oddly embarrassed. "There was a girl there . . . at a hot dog stand . . . she talked to me some. None of them others would even talk. . . ."

Dennis Silver grinned with a friendly lifting of the corners of his mouth.

"Liked you, too, Menkilvich."

"Yessir . . . she said she liked me. . . ."

A shaft of slanting sunlight had drifted across Recruit Steve Menkilvich and there was something akin to animation in the heavy, dough-colored face—something which was trying to wipe away those lines which the lonesome nights had etched there. The big man straightened his shoulders a little, lifted his head to look at Dennis Silver for a fleeting moment.

"A little homesick for Brooklyn, aren't you, Menkilvich?"

Mumbled words and eyes on the floor again. Then Steve Menkilvich's lips stirred again and Dennis Silver sat, quiet and thoughtful, while the fears and horrors of those tortured nights paraded themselves obscenely across the cheerful brightness of the orderly room.

"I can't stand it, sir . . . oh, my God!"

It was an awful thing to hear crazy hysteria arising from that lump of a man who huddled still on the edge of the chair. Saliva drooled from the corners of Steve Menkilvich's mouth; his big hands opened and closed around each other.

"You gotta send me back, Lootenant! This country . . . I can't stand no more of it! It's like bein' in prison, I tell yuh! Th' army's like bein' in prison. I tell yuh I'm goin' crazy if yuh don't send me back! I'll desert, I tell yuh! I'll desert! You gotta let me go, Lootenant!"

Words! Those Articles of War, which had been read to Recruit Steve Menkilvich, could send him to prison for such words. A good way to get rid of the worst man in the company—but the Silvers were not made so.

Dennis Silver got up slowly and walked to the paneless window. The air was heavy; the royal palms, in front of the row of officer's quarters, stirred gently in the heat. Dennis Silver turned back and, at his look, the crazy gibber died on Steve Menkilvich's lips.

Dennis Silver said, "The regiment has had many men come to it, Menkilvich. Men who have been homesick; men who have been afraid—just as you are afraid. Listen while I tell you about some of them."

Dennis Silver spoke in a dry dispassionate voice, but heroes marched behind his words. They stood at his shoulder and peered through the cigarette smoke; men in tattered regimentals and men in blue shirts who carried Krags in their hands; men with the battle shouts of the Wilderness in their mouths. There were Silvers there—and homeless men like Recruit Steve Menkilvich.

There were the men of Balangiga, who had broken the legs from the mess tables for weapons and who had died in the gray dawn, shouting defiance at a hundred times their number. There were the Shane twins, who had held a ford

with the bayonet all through one long night on the Old North Line. And there was Terry Gale. The regiment still stood at mess when they drank to Terry's memory—seventeen and homesick and laughing at Alcazar's brown devils with bloodless lips while they buried him in an ant hill with honey in his mouth. It was days later when the regiment found him.

It was of these that Dennis Silver spoke and Recruit Steve Menkilvich sat there with his red hands between his knees while he listened.

"All of them were afraid, Menkilvich. Do you see? Deathly afraid—yet they carried on. You've got to carry on, too. Do you understand now?"

THAT little spark was glowing again in Big Steve Menkilvich's muddy eyes. He shuffled his feet awkwardly, lifted his head. Dennis Silver thought that he was going to speak.

Outside, in the other office, the clatter of the typewriter died away and the company clerk's laughter drifted across the sudden stillness. The spell was broken and those heroic figures, which had stood at Dennis Silver's shoulder, melted back into the curtain of the forgotten years.

Recruit Steve Menkilvich had turned his head to listen; the light was dying out of his face, leaving it blank and sullen again. Dennis Silver swore under his breath. He knew that he had lost.

The moment had gone. The man in front of him was no longer Private Steve Menkilvich—a soldier of the regiment who was privileged to serve where the men of Balangiga had served, to march with gallant shade of Terry Gale striding along at his shoulder. Once more he had become Recruit Steve Menkilvich—a man whose rifle was always dirty and whose shoes were not shined. Dennis Silver knew but he tried once more.

"They carried on, Menkilvich. If they did it, you can. How about it?"

"No!" Words—crazy words. "I can't stand it. You got to let me go!"

Dennis Silver swung back toward his desk, crushed out the cigarette stub with a swift stab of his fingers, sat down heavily. Jared Hale opened the door, came in with the sunlight bright along the bars on his shoulders and sweat splotches marking the back of his shirt. He nodded and then dropped into a chair and hooked a booted leg across the arm while he waited for Dennis Silver to finish.

Dennis said wearily, "Stand up, Menkilvich, and listen to what I'm about to say to you. I'm too proud of this outfit to have poor soldiers in it. Do you understand?"

It was like speaking words against a stone wall. Recruit Steve Menkilvich stood there woodenly, his arms limp and his face slack again with his expressionless stare. An untidy lump of a man, a man whom God had cast in an imperfect mold and had thrown away. Dennis Silver sighed a little under his breath.

"Your last chance, Menkilvich. Don't forget."

"Sullen brute," Jared Hale said indifferently after Recruit Steve Menkilvich had gone.

Dennis Silver shook his head and fumbled again for the brown papers and the little sack of tobacco. He was silent for a moment while he smoked and looked at the empty parade ground. Mess call was blowing, the brassy notes harsh and cheerful against the midday.

"A sullen child, Jared," Dennis Silver said after a while. "A child who has been locked in a dark closet and can't get out."

Jared Hale laughed and mopped at his red face with a soggy handkerchief. The regiment liked Dennis Silver—but there were times when the regiment did not understand him.

Jared Hale said, "Come on over to the club, Dennis. I'll stand you a beer."

Back in the cool dimness of the squad-room Recruit Steve Menkilvich sat on the edge of his bunk with his hands clasped between his knees. There was laughter around him; soldier talk. He felt more lonely, somehow, than he had ever felt before. For a moment he was sorry that he hadn't told the "lootenant" some more about Mary—and Coney Island.

THAT had been a week ago. Two mornings later, the regiment had gone out between the twin pillars of Otis Gate and had headed northward through the cactus-sprinkled lava.

Now it was the last night out of home again and so the regiment sang as it came down the trail. Whistles piped along the column and the ranks broke. March fifty and rest ten. The regiment would strike the sea in another hour; it would make camp there while the dusk came down—dusk filled with the pleasant smell of things cooking in the rolling kitchens. There was no longer need to hoard those spoonfuls of lukewarm water in canteens which had been tasted so sparingly back there in the barren lava of Hanea Gulch.

Men talked lazily in the shade of the cactus as they lay with heads pillowed on packs and dusty rifles across their bodies. Then the whistles piped again and infantrymen straggled back into the brown ribbon of the trail. Commands barked sharply and the column wound on down through the slanting shadows. The song lifted again.

At the head of the column a travel-grimed motorcycle driver dropped his wheel stand into the dust and walked, stiff-legged, toward the Old Man. He saluted and tugged at the flap of a dispatch pouch. The colonel took the message without words.

He read swiftly.

The colonel was an old man, lean and tough as an ironwood stump. His poker face betrayed nothing as he turned toward the west and stared for a long moment. There was a smoky glow there which no sunset had ever made. He turned back to the officers who waited behind him.

"Gentlemen," he told them, "there is a bad fire in Koona Gulch which is threatening Koona Village. We will march there tonight. Trucks, with tools from one of the plantations, will meet us at daylight. Get your companies ready to move in half an hour. That is all, gentlemen."

The wind had shifted and was coming in from the sea—cool wind, sweet with the tang of salt water. The shadows were long across the dust.

The regiment didn't sing through the long hours of that night. It was a bitter march. But no man fell out, although pack straps cut into tired shoulders with dull, clawing pain and rifles had become intolerable burdens.

The moon came up after a while and the glow in the west was a glow no longer, but a great splash of scarlet painted across the sky. Koona Village lay that way. The night was quiet except for the *clump* of feet which stumbled a little now. Occasionally the iron tires of the machine-gun carts clattered sharply against a lava chunk.

March fifty and rest ten. March fifty and rest ten. Sixty minutes to every hour! The regiment went on, as it had gone on at Yorktown and at Cerro Gordo and along the Old North Line.

They turned into the road at the mouth of Koona Gulch an hour before dawn and the cool air was acrid with the smell of smoke. A half a dozen miles, up there ahead, fire was roaring down through the *algeroba* thickets and the baked grass and the *lantana* clumps, which had been turned into tinder by five months of broiling sun.

That sun came up now, a red globe

through the smoke, and the light slid stealthily along the walls of the big valley which was Koona Gulch. It touched red-rimmed and weary eyes; it slanted across shoulders which sagged damply under mustard-colored packs.

So the regiment went on.

The trucks were waiting beyond Koona Village and there was coffee, hot and laced with a shot of rum, and there were egg sandwiches and bacon. The coffee tasted good. For a quarter of an hour they rested there and then the whistles piped again. It is not good for weary men to rest too long when there is work to be done. Muscles stiffen and the will to go forward, which drives a man when everything else is gone, dulls as inactivity knots the tiredness into steel chains about a man's body.

"Fall in! Fall in!"

They traded packs and rifles for hoes, shovels, burlap sacks with which they would beat back the red menace which was crawling down the gulch. Brown children, dirty-faced and scantily clad, gathered around them and watched, eyes wide. Women squatted on verandas of flimsy houses and looked at the black pall of the smoke.

The regiment marched on again—up that dusty road toward where a handful of men were trying, vainly, to stop the fire which was galloping toward their homes.

Dennis Silver marched beside his company. A little in front, he could see the hunched and beefy shoulders of Recruit Steve Menkilvich. Steve Menkilvich, who carried a shovel and who plodded forward with his eyes on the ground.

AT three o'clock in the afternoon the regiment lay in a thin semicircle across Koona Gulch and watched while a wall of flame trotted toward the twenty foot trench which they had scraped across the lava. It was here that the fight would be; that red devil must be stopped at the trench. It was hot. The sun was cruel beyond the shifting banner of the smoke; red-hot cinders dropped among burned and exhausted men.

Dennis Silver squatted, for a moment, in the shade of a lava boulder and listened to what Sergeant Calvin was saying.

"Niedheimer an' Smiley both got burns—not bad. I sent 'em back to th' aid station."

Dennis Silver nodded. He was very tired and his mouth was parched and dry. He stopped to wonder, a little, if this line would stop the waves of that red sea a quarter of a mile away. Two other lines had failed to hold.

Smoke boiled up out of the valley and the crackle of the burning *lantana* was like the vicious spit of musketry fire. A mile away a narrow ridge butted out into the valley and flames curled upward beyond its steep sides. It was like an island in an eddying and scarlet sea.

"She's comin' fast," the first sergeant said under his breath. "Th' wind is gettin' stronger, too."

All across the valley men waited.

The wind roared down the valley in a vicious gale and the crimson smoke bellied about dun figures who patrolled the fighting line. Men fell back, blinded and choking, and others plodded up to take their places. The battle was on again.

A quarter of an hour later Dennis Silver staggered out of the smoke with a frayed and blackened sack in his hand. His shirt hung in rags and his eyes were dark marbles which peered through the grimy mask of his face. A tongue of flame leaped twenty feet across the cinder-scarred trench and boiled up angrily in a clump of grass. Two men sprang at it, kicking it out with cracked and charred shoes, beating at it with what had once been burlap sacks. The flames died away—and another patch

of brush leaped into flame a hundred feet away. Other men smothered it.

They were holding their own, but the margin was small.

A grimy figure panted up the lava-scored slope behind the fighting line. The figure stopped beside a gaunt scarecrow and the scarecrow turned and pointed toward where Dennis Silver was. The grimy figure came on. It was Hervey Turin, the Old Man's adjutant.

"We've got to fall back," he shouted. "We're going to put a new line across the gulch where it narrows, a half a mile back."

"We're holding here," Dennis Silver told him above the roar.

"I know—but it's gotten by McCandless in the third battalion on the other side of the ridge. That's a damned wind tunnel over there and it went over the third battalion line like a big wave. A dozen men are burned—bad."

"The men are tired—damned tired," Dennis Silver said between tight lips. "We need help, Hervey."

"There's two regiments on the way from Schofield. We've got to hold until sundown."

"Tell the Old Man we'll hold."

Turin went back down the way he had come, stumbling a little and brushing at his face with his hands. For a moment Dennis Silver stood looking at the crackling fury which was leaping across the scattered lava flows. The ridge, at whose base they had lost the fight for the second trench, still loomed through the smoke like an island with red hot surf flowing toward it.

DENNIS SILVER wondered why his thoughts kept going back to that ridge. He guessed that there was a wind pocket in there; a dead space which the reaching fingers of the gale couldn't grasp. That would be the reason that the fire crept forward so slowly. He turned to meet Sergeant Calvin, who was coming through the smoke.

"We're moving back," Dennis Silver said and his lips cracked when he tried to speak. "We'll dig another trench a half a mile down the gulch."

"It's got across?"

"On the other side of the ridge. I want a roll call before we leave, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

Dennis Silver leaned against the boulder and waited. He could feel tears cutting down across the grimy mask of his face. Sergeant Calvin's voice was dull and hoarse above the crackle of the flames.

"Gadley!"

"Here."

"Higgins!"

"Hur."

His voice lifted and fell monotonously and men answered with weary tones. Twice he called names and there was no answer. The men who had gone back to the aid station, Dennis Silver knew.

"Menkilvich!"

Then the first sergeant was standing in front of Dennis Silver again and there was a strange look on the old man's face.

"Menkilvich is missin', sir. Th' rest are all here."

"Where is he?"

A stolid figure was plodding up, head bent and eyes sober behind the dirty mask of his face. Corporal Lane—with his eyebrows burned away and the palms of his hands raw blisters.

"It's my fault. It's my fault, sir," he was saying in a thick voice. "I forgot about 'im—an' he's in my squad."

"Who?"

"Th' big Hunky—Menkilvich."

"Where is he?"

"We was cuttin' th' second trench an' he was sick—real sick. He wasn't shammin', sir. Sick with the smoke an' heat. I told him tuh get in th' shade under

th' ridge an' lay down until he was all right again."

"That's been three hours ago," Dennis Silver said softly.

"Yes, sir." Corporal Lane's face was a twisted, unforgettable thing. "Then th' orders came tuh fall back—an' I forgot about him bein' over by th' ridge."

Behind Dennis Silver other tired and dirty faces peered through the shifting curtain of the smoke. A half a mile away fire boiled suddenly at the foot of a shallow gulch, raced upward toward the valley rim in a mad stampede. Smoke hung across the sky in a somber banner.

Dennis Silver was very tired. It was an effort to think; to push himself upright, away from the supporting shoulder of the rock. He remembered, suddenly, how Recruit Steve Menkilvich's doughy face had looked back there in the company office on a sunny morning two weeks ago.

"My fault." The thought was clear and sharp across Dennis Silver's perceptions—like the flash of sunlight on a polished bayonet. "There was no roll call at the second line."

Then a man was speaking from a vast distance and he was surprised to realize that it was himself.

"Take the company back, Sergeant Calvin. Make contact with the company on your left and start your trench across where the gulch swings around toward the village."

"Yes sir—an' th' lootenant. . . . ?"

"I'll join you later, Calvin."

There was sudden understanding in the first sergeant's flinty eyes. He half lifted a dirty hand, dropped it to his side again while he turned to look up the valley.

"Get the men started, Calvin."

"Very good, sir."

They went slowly with their feet dragging across the hot, charred ground. Above them the red eye of the sun peered balefully through the smoke.

DENNIS SILVER stood for a moment, looking.

He was going back across that inferno out there to bring in Recruit Steve Menkilvich. The worst man in the company, but Dennis Silver would bring him—the Silvers looked after their own.

The ridge was dim through the smoke; unmarked, as yet, by the hurrying flames. It was just beyond that they had abandoned the second line three hours ago. Dennis Silver charted a mental course through the perilous half mile which he would have to cross. It would be bad going.

He went across the trench and into the smoke.

The soles of his boots cracked from the steaming lava; it was as if he ran across a gigantic, red hot griddle. Poisonous vapors boiled around his face and snatched at his lungs with biting, acrid fingers.

Twice he flung himself down with his face sheltered by a lava crack, while twisted thickets of brush roared up in gigantic bonfires. Heat stabbed at his back; the smell of his scorched hair assaulted his nostrils. He couldn't run now. He went slowly with his feet dragging and his shoulders bent against the lash of the heat. His hands felt swollen and awkward at the ends of his wrists and it was hard to keep a straight course toward that shoulder of rock which butted out into the valley.

It was nearer now, though.

It was a long time afterward, it seemed to him, that he found Recruit Steve Menkilvich crouched in a shallow cave against the lava cliff. A hundred yards away a red line of fire was eating its way slowly forward. Presently it would reach the *lantana* again and boil up in a mighty cauldron of fire.

Recruit Steve Menkilvich moved his lips and passed a dirty hand across his face.

"It's th' lootenant," he said thickly after a little.

Dennis Silver squatted in the shade and gulped at the clear air which lay here in the pocket. The smoke was not so bad; shade was a welcome relief after the blistering heat of the lava.

"They said you were sick," Dennis Silver told him harshly. "Damn you, you're as well as I am. Why didn't you get on back to the outfit?"

The big man shook his head stupidly and that blank and frightened look deepened at the back of his eyes. He wet his lips.

Dennis Silver brushed a hand across his face; his lips were cracked wide and the taste of blood was salty in his mouth. That line of fire was a scant fifty yards away now; when it crawled into that powdery *lantana*, the ridge would be an island no longer.

"Get up on your feet!" Dennis Silver's voice slapped at the big man through the dying afternoon. "We're going back!"

Recruit Steve Menkilvich stared dumbly at his officer. His blank gaze crawled on by to fasten on that sinister stretch across which they must go.

Dennis Silver was saying in a flat and listless voice, "Get up on your feet, damn you. Get up on your feet. We're going back."

The fear which had lived with Recruit Steve Menkilvich for seven months broke its dam. Menkilvich slid forward on his face; his voice shrieked hoarsely above the snarl of the fire.

"I ain't goin'! I'm afraid! I ain't goin' . . . that fire . . . oh, my God!"

Dennis Silver's face was drawn and old beneath its sooty mask. He stepped forward, jerked the screaming man to his knees. Behind, the fire chuckled with malicious satisfaction as it crept forward to that powder train of dry *lantana*.

Recruit Steve Menkilvich was staring, stupid-faced, as he crouched on his hands and knees. Dennis Silver felt sick at his stomach as he struck the other across the mouth.

"Get up, Menkilvich!"

Dark blood stained the big man's face and dribbled down across his pasty chin. He shook his head a little and there was a tiny spark at the back of his eyes. Dennis Silver struck again—it required tremendous effort to drive his fist across that twelve inches.

That spark was deeper now, a queer glow. Recruit Steve Menkilvich was slowly pushing himself to his feet while his lips moved. For a moment he swayed in front of Dennis Silver.

"Yuh hit me," Recruit Steve Menkilvich was saying in a thick voice. "Yer an officer an' yuh hit me! I'll get yuh for that! By God, I'll get yuh!"

Dennis Silver hit him again.

"Get going, Menkilvich! Damn you, run!"

THEY went across the lava at a shuffling trot. Once away from the shelter of the ridge, the wind caught them; it wrapped them in a gray, stifling mantle. Two minutes, maybe three if they were lucky, and that line of fire would reach the *lantana;* it was a powder train which was creeping toward a magazine of bone-dry grass—acres of grass, thick and tangled and twice as high as a man's head. Once a spark dropped into that a sheet of flame would boil across the lava, leaving nothing which lived in its wake.

The rock was blistering under Dennis Silver's plodding feet; the smoke choked him and swift stabs of pain ripped at his temples. He went on. Ahead of him, a shapeless blot in the fire-laced fog, went Big Steve Menkilvich.

The thing happened with an appalling suddenness.

A lava crack had opened under Dennis Silver's foot. Edged fingers clutched his ankle in a vicious grasp, pitched him forward onto his face. He felt his leg break as the flinty rock scored the burned palms of his hands.

He cried out a little, he knew, and pain flowed over him in a blinding wave. Then, for a fleeting instant, his mind was very clear. He could see the leaping spear points of the flames a scant fifty yards away; he could feel the slap of the heat across his lips. The wind was thinning the smoke a little and Big Steve Menkilvich was standing and looking back across his shoulder.

Dennis Silver laughed crazily. Big Steve Menkilvich's face was like a blob of dough—a blob of dough which the Big Baker had spoiled and thrown out. The man who couldn't keep his rifle clean and who forgot his guard orders and who would be lying back there under the ridge if Dennis Silver hadn't beaten him away.

"Go on. . . ." Dennis Silver could hear himself saying. "Go on, damn you."

The smoke curtain closed again and the pain possessed him utterly. He tried to crawl but the lava held him; he could hear the crackling gulp as the flames bit at the first of the grass clumps. Then unconsciousness blotted out the picture.

Recruit Steve Menkilvich had hesitated a dozen feet away. His face was twisted. The valley was a roaring inferno of sound now; a quarter of a mile away a dozen acres of brush exploded into a single geyser of vomiting flame.

A red hot cinder clawed at the back of his neck. He cried out hoarsely and went on across the lava toward the safety which waited down the valley. He looked back over his shoulder again and there was nothing to see except the back drop of the smoke. He ran faster—Big Steve Menkilvich, who had been born in a slum and who had once gone to Coney Island.

Big Steve Menkilvich, who didn't sing when the regiment was marching and whose shoes were never shined for inspection and who lay on his bunk at night and shivered while ten thousand fears plucked at him. Big Steve Menkilvich, who had been struck in the face by his officer because he was a coward.

And then, there in the boiling cauldron which had been Koona Gulch, a very wonderful thing happened to Recruit Steve Menkilvich.

Perhaps it was that the curtain of the years was torn away for a moment and those grand old men—men of Cerro Gordo and the Wilderness and the Old North Line—laid hands upon Recruit Steve Menkilvich's shoulder. Perhaps they spoke to him there. Perhaps he could feel the touch of their shoulders through the smoke.

Big Steve Menkilvich's run slowed to a shambling walk; it stopped altogether. He looked back again. The leaping fire was bright across the fear, which was still in his eyes, but his lips were no longer slack. Something had come into them—a something which was hard, almost heroic. *Private* Steve Menkilvich didn't know it, but the same look had been on the faces of those men who had died at Balangiga with the legs of mess tables in their hands.

"He come back after me," Private Steve Menkilvich said aloud. "He didn't have to do it."

He went back into the smoke and there was just a hint of a lean tightness about his shoulders as he went. His run was no longer shambling, somehow; there was something clean and fine about it. So had those blue-shirted men gone across the rice paddies with their Krag-Jorgensons in their hands.

DENNIS SILVER opened his eyes.

The world was going up in flame; the roar of it was like the solid smash of surf against a sea wall. There was nothing but a vast numbness where his left leg had been. His face was jammed deep into a hole scraped out of the rotting lava; something heavy was pressing against his back.

After a long while he understood.

He was lying back in the niche in the wall where he had first found Private Steve Menkilvich. Private Steve Menkilvich had scraped that hole so that he could breathe; Private Steve Menkilvich was shielding him from the blistering heat with the wall of his own body. By some miracle both of them still lived.

After a long while it was over. The leaping banner of flame had gone and there was nothing left where the thicket had stood except a desert of blackened and smoking ground. A mile down the valley, the flame still roared onward.

The sunset was red and wicked over the western wall of the gulch; after that the darkness would come. Hot darkness, but good after the blasting heat of the day. The two men sat with their backs against the wall while the grayish light died.

Private Steve Menkilvich had been binding a rude splint about Dennis Silver's leg. He straightened now and sat back on his heels. Dennis Silver looked at him.

Shirt gone and the hair burned tight against his scalp—a big, ugly man with the skin of his face cracking and the grime of the fire deep in him. It was at his eyes that Dennis Silver looked. There was something queer—something new—about Big Steve Menkilvich's eyes. And then Dennis Silver understood and, in spite of the pain, found room to be glad.

Those flames, which had roared up over the lava, had burned more than the *lantana*, the tangled cactus. They had purged away those black imps who had twined their fingers about Private Steve Menkilvich.

"Steve," Dennis Silver jerked forward to stretch out a blistered hand. "Steve, I'm proud to know you."

Private Steve Menkilvich stared solemnly from behind his bloodshot eyes.

"Us fellers, in th' reg'ment, has got tuh stand together, Lootenant," he said.

The line which the regiment had again built across the gulch held. The wind was dying a little now and the smoke was not as bad. It was a tough fight, though. More men were being carried back to the aid station at the edge of Koona Village.

Then trucks roared through the sunset; powerful trucks, painted a mustard green and loaded with the men of two fresh regiments. They ground to a halt a hundred yards back of the fighting line and men boiled over the sideboards.

A tall man, with stars on his shoulders, approached the blackened scarecrow which had once been the colonel of the regiment. His voice carried, with a clear ring, across the dusk.

"A magnificent job, Colonel. Your men have saved Koona Village. You may fall back now, sir. We'll take over. A magnificent job—you, and your regiment, may well be proud!"

And the weary specters went back from that line which they had defended for twelve crucifying hours. There was coffee and hot food beyond Koona Village; there was rest.

There was no talking, no laughing now, and the little brown kids stared at them with round eyes and the men of the fresh regiments stood aside and looked at them respectfully. And, in Dennis Silver's company, tragedy hung over their heads as dark as the funeral pall of the smoke which drifted along toward the sea.

The word had been spread. Dennis Silver had gone back to the second line for Big Steve Menkilvich. Dennis Silver had not returned.

A big kitchen had been set up beyond Koona Village and gasoline lanterns threw white light across the grass. Men ate and fell asleep with their mess kits in their hands. Only, in Dennis Silver's company, was there any talk. Men gathered in little groups there and their words were bitter.

"It was my fault!" Corporal Lane said dully.

Black Jim Condon swore under his breath with a monotonous dribble of sound; Egg Timmons, his bunky, tried to smoke, spat out the cigarette, began to roll another.

"An' for Menkilvich—that stinkin'—"

Up near the edge of the village a sentry from one of the fresh regiments argued loudly, his voice drifting down the wind in vague and disjointed phrases. Another voice answered him thickly.

" . . . git away . . . git away . . ."

"Take 'im . . . aid station . . . I tell yuh . . . yuh crazy Wop . . . I'll git a stretcher. . . ."

" . . . git away . . . damn yuh. . . ."

Then the low mumbles, which had been slipping back and forth in Dennis Silver's company, died away completely. Men straightened and listened and the silence had become a living and breathing thing. It couldn't be—but it was!

A song was coming down the road from beyond Koona Village; a song which wavered uncertainly on the hot wind which was lifting from the sea. A song which two men were singing tunelessly but which carried the *clump-thud* of marching feet in it.

"Damn . . . damn . . . *damn* . . . the . . . *insurrectos!*"

The gasoline lanterns by the kitchens were clear and bright; it was not hard to see as the tired men of Dennis Silver's company struggled to their feet.

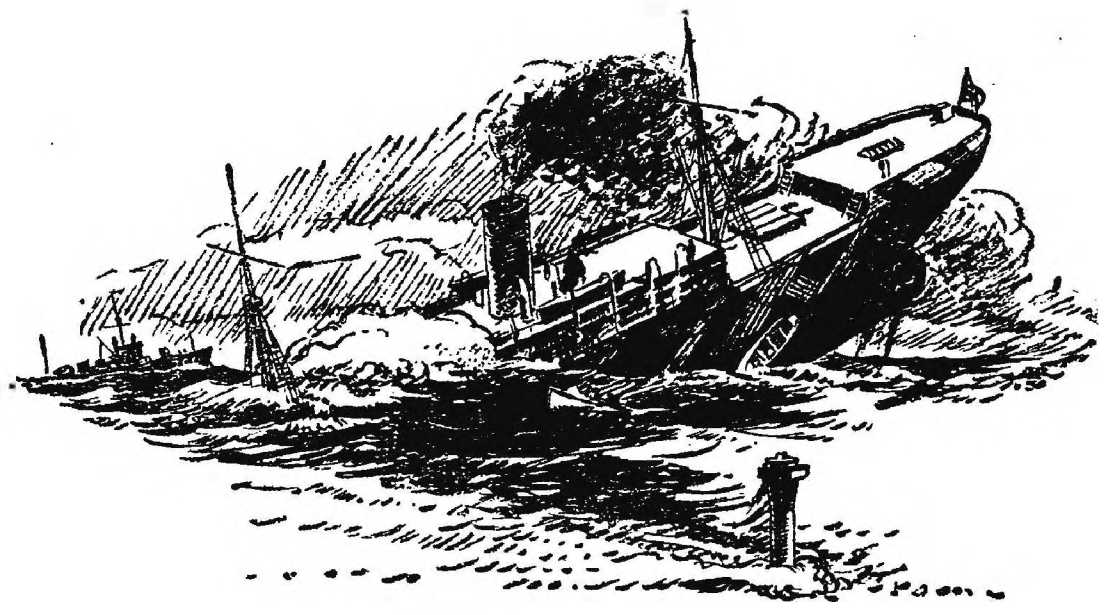
A gaunt, shapeless thing was out there; it was staggering home—toward the regiment where it belonged. For a moment the watchers were silent; then they saw—and understood. Private Steve Menkilvich was plodding forward into the light, and astride his shoulders rode Dennis Silver. The two sang in cracked and broken voices as they came.

Up on the fighting line, the men of the fresh regiments listened to that triumphant roar which was lifting into the night from beyond Koona Village. A magnificent acclaim which crawled up from a thousand tough throats.

"Damn, damn, *damn* the *insurrectos!*"

And, far above the smoke, those older ones who had marched on away behind the traditions of Balangiga and Rio Chico and the Old North Line, must have heard, too. They must have smiled, for they knew that the song was good.

THUNDER AT SEA



By Ray Millholland

CAPTAIN C. GUTHRIE, U.S.N.—"Copper Guts" to every man in the splinter fleet he commanded—paced the bridge of his flagship U.S.S. *Leonidas* and pitched a sharp look astern through his binoculars. The twenty-four wooden submarine chasers came bobbing and skipping along with the spontaneous uniformity of porpoises following a lumbering whale for the sheer fun of it.

A British destroyer, flying a full hoist of code flags in answer to a challenge from the signal station on Gibraltar mole, steamed ahead as guide, with an air of "This way, please. Mind you Yankee tourists don't blunder into the mole getting in!"

Unhurried brown eyes followed the circular sweep of the binoculars to a small steam launch speeding out from the Admiralty landing at the base of England's mightiest fortress.

Captain Guthrie dropped his glasses and spoke to a slim young ensign at his elbow: "Mr. Johnson, present my compliments to the officer of the deck and suggest we lower our starboard gangway immediately on entering the harbor. That's the British admiral's barge heading this way."

As the *Leonidas* poked her bluff tramp-steamer bows up to a mooring buoy, the admiral's barge pulled alongside. A junior aide came smartly up the gangway and saluted the quarter deck with impersonal correctness.

"Presenting Admiral Tyndham's compliments, sir," he said to Captain Guthrie. "He regrets that pressure of business prevented his making a personal call, and asks the captain's attendance at the Admiralty office at his earliest convenience."

With a coolly correct salute, the aide departed. Quick resentment flared in Ensign Johnson's eyes as they flickered between the slightly sardonic amusement tugging at a cheek muscle of his commander and the aloof retreat of the brisk young British officer.

"Sending you orders by a baby-faced one-striper. The nerve of the bum!" Ensign Johnson was speaking his in-

dignation aloud without realizing his offense. "I suppose if old Copper Guts was George Washington himself we might rate an order delivered by a junior grade lieutenant."

The remarks ended in a confused gulp, with Captain Guthrie's steady gaze fixed on his subordinate.

"Save the rest till we've sunk a few subs, Mr. Johnson." A frankly questioning eye took in the entire splinter fleet, then fanning out over Gibraltar harbor and busy at mooring three abreast to the buoys. "Um—not a very imposing sight to any big-ship man."

Ensign Johnson's shoulders snapped back. He had not been in the Navy long enough to learn the trick of masking his emotions.

"I felt the same way as you do, sir," he blurted out. "But after watching them come four thousand miles under their own power through the dirtiest weather in the book, I've changed my mind. Wooden ships, yes. But iron men—"

Captain Guthrie slewed his cap around till the gold leaves on the visor reflected a yet ruddier light upon Johnson's face.

"Who told you how I feel about that string of match boxes?"

Johnson snapped his heels together and pulled in his chin.

"Beg your pardon, sir. Shan't forget myself again."

Old Copper Guts slid his hand under an astonished arm and pulled Johnson over to the bridge rail beside him.

"Tut!" he grunted. It was one of his rare lapses from his hammer-and-tongs method of driving the splinter fleet through fair and foul weather—the fouler, the more bulldog showed. "I feel," he confided, "like a hound with a litter of pups at her heels feels when she bumps into a grizzly." A brief chuckle crackled on his lips. "But I wouldn't trade jobs with Sams and the two admiral's stars on his collar and all his destroyers, at that." He rapped a knuckle against the lean ribs of his young aide. "Just keep your pride in your pocket, my boy. These English navy men are a bit stand-offish until they know who the other chap is. After we've picked a few shell splinters out of our ribs we can take exceptions to their manners."

"Weren't you a classmate of Sams' at the Academy, sir?" Johnson clamped his jaws shut and swallowed the rest of his question. "I—I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered. "Didn't mean to infer—Well, you're a captain and Admiral Sams has two stars on his collar. You get what I didn't mean to infer. I—I— Oh, hang it, sir! The whole splinter fleet thinks you're the best officer in the Service."

Copper Guts chose to ignore the unmilitary hero worship blazing in Johnson's boyish eyes.

"Slip down in my cabin and get my dispatch case," he ordered impersonally. "I'm going ashore to see the admiral at once."

Then he turned to pace the bridge thoughtfully. There was no use being annoyed at the youngster for raising that question about the difference in rank between himself and Sams, he insisted to himself. Until a man gets to be a captain and sees the sheer cliff between himself and the silver stars of an admiral, he never quite realizes the dragging penalty of losing a few "numbers" from his promotion rating at Washington.

There was that time when he and Sams started from scratch together—both promoted to junior grade lieutenants in the same general order and placed in command of tiny torpedo boats—those little sheet-iron hulls that curved their keels like a snake when the hot sun struck one side and expanded the metal. Peacetime service in them was simply torture to a young officer at all particular about his mess and eternal grease spots on every scrap of white uniform he owned. A man with any spirit,

under such circumstances, built up internal pressure. It had to blow out some place.

Sams, the lucky beggar, blew off his pressure by going over the heads of the old moss-bills of the Bureau and wrote his historic letter to the President, damning the gunnery of the Navy from keel to truck. And the row that raised! Copper Guts paused his deck-pacing to let a smile leave his lips before turning around and exposing his face to the officer of the deck at the other end of the bridge.

Yes, Sams had been lucky—or smarter. His criticism would have earned him a court martial. Dismissal or reduction in rank—if he had not proved his case with blasting facts, and a plan to improve the gunnery of the Navy. That was what saved his neck.

Copper Guts took another quick turn across the bridge and then looked down to watch with silently critical attention the launching of his own twin-engine gasoline barge from the davits. His own blow-up on the torpedo boats had come in less brilliant fashion. It started with that hamper of champagne the Brazilian minister brought aboard with him the time a bobbing torpedo boat, flying an enormous American ensign, pulled up alongside a Brazilian cruiser outside Cape Henry to take off the minister and escort him to Washington.

What a kick there had been in the stuff! That flying landing he had made in front of the old Chamberlin Hotel at Newport News. Fifty rivets loosened from the sardine-can hull, and the chief gunner's mate reporting water in the hold, raising an inch a minute!

Well, that little bit of hilarity had cost him fifty numbers on his promotion record, while Sams was jumping several grades as a reward for *his* method of blowing off pressure. After that, it didn't seem to matter. Fifty more numbers, dished out on the quiet when the Bureau got wind of the time he had taken the big-jawed President out for some crash dives in the old *Shark*. That sub never did promise to come up again after an old maid's dive—crash dives in her were about as safe as going to sea in a paper box loaded with anchors.

With one thing and another—well, it all boiled down to Sams wearing two silver stars of an admiral and C. Guthrie lucky to get the four gold stripes of a captain when the war started rocketing the older men in the Service to staff rank.

"Brilliant, but erratic. Not sufficiently observant of the finer points of command, as required by Navy Regulations." That was written on his record as an officer and would remain until his retirement. Men younger than himself were already rear admirals. And none of them cared for the questionable honor of commanding a fleet of splinter boats. So he got them—and was glad to get an independent command.

To the farthest part of the war zone they had finally sent him. To the Adriatic. He knew just as well as they did why he was sent: What he did out there wouldn't make a bit of difference in the final outcome of the war.

But back in Washington they would still be watching him. Still expecting him to get involved in a "situation." War or no war, still expecting the grim satisfaction to be had from drawing a line through his name on the active list and marking: "Retired for the good of the Service."

He had long ago changed his views about some superior being his personal enemy. It was just that impersonal thing, Regulations, which never forgave and never forgot.

Copper Guts shrugged off his thoughts and nodded briskly to his officer of the deck when the running boat was reported ready. And in another few minutes he went streaking across the slight chop of Gibraltar harbor to the Admiralty landing.

ON the second floor of the grim stone building overlooking one of Britain's naval bases, Admiral Tyndham waited at the doorway of his private office. From his superior height, he cast down an unsmiling welcome, cold gray eyes deliberately appraising the blocky jaw, the steady, unflinching brown eyes, and the powerful shoulders that supported his new American colleague's shoulder straps horizontally, without the hint of any sloping.

"Sorry to rush you, Captain," he said without adding sincerity to his formal statement. "We're pressed, you know. Shall we step in?"

A crisp handshake was returned with an equally quick release. Copper Guts glanced over the spacious, bare office floor and approved. There was no senseless raffle of gear around the place to impress the visitor. Three chairs and a heavy, old-fashioned desk in the corner. Wide windows overlooking the harbor. And a piece of torn steel ships' plate, with a fragment of torpedo imbedded in it, next to the desk, a grim reminder of the war that was eating its way into the solid British structure like a fire in a peat bog, slow, but relentlessly destructive.

"No, thanks. Rather stand," said Copper Guts in reply to Admiral Tyndham's gesture toward a chair.

"Good. I think better on my feet also," was the comment. "Let's step to the window and look over things while we talk."

"Twenty-four problems in differential calculus," mused Copper Guts, watching from the window his splinter fleet complete mooring operations. Yes, and that pile of rust out there—my flagship—makes twenty-five. She can do seven knots with a fair wind and her galley fire going."

"And twenty-five new worries added to mine," came the slightly acid comment.

"I imagine you've got enough without worrying about us," rejoined Copper Guts even-temperedly.

Admiral Tyndham turned cold eyes from the window.

"Let's start by being brutally frank and save future misunderstanding—a few lives possibly. What?"

Undetected humor flickered for an instant in a pair of American eyes. But they were all business when Copper Guts said, "Barge right ahead, sir. I was cured long ago of my only case of diplomatic ear."

"Ah," said the admiral, with a politely inquisitive glance at a faint scar running from an ear up into crisp, graying hair. "A nasty bit of a crack. Knocked you quite unconscious, I dare say." A pair of English brows began knitting out the puzzle. "But I fail to see the connection—did it affect your hearing?"

"Only when listening to diplomats talk about lack of enthusiasm for my splinter fleet, when they mean they haven't a damn bit of use for 'em."

A sharp downward glance failed to read Captain Guthrie's thoughts. Admiral Tyndham nodded by way of a gesture to soften his next remark.

"Thank you, Captain. I was just balancing my choice of the two ways of expressing that same opinion. You've brought wooden ships over here to fight dangerous submarines—some of them with armored superstructures. It's folly. The attempt is no reflection on American courage, sir, but it does put you chaps' intelligence in a dashed unfavorable light."

"That's yet to be learned, both the courage and the intelligence," was the urbane retort. "Our Mark Four depth mines might surprise everybody." Copper Guts smiled openly for the first time. "I'm anxious to learn the answer to both questions as soon as possible, Admiral."

"Unsuitable ships. No experience. The trouble exactly," Admiral Tyndham

clipped out. "You've been sent over here to teach and coddle."

"The word 'coddle,'" remarked Copper Guts blandly, "is not in my dictionary. I grant you fellows, with three years of this war behind you, can teach us plenty worth knowing, though."

"I haven't time to play headmaster."

The comment brought a flush creeping up from under Copper Guts' collar, but it subsided before it became noticeable on his ears. "Nor can I spare any of my officers who knows the fundamentals to teach you chaps," added Admiral Tyndham.

The azure surface of the Mediterranean stretched limitlessly eastward from the window at which the two were standing. A short distance out, on a course obviously laid for Malta, the next haven of safety for British ships, six cargo vessels steamed along in convoy with three destroyers.

"You could have kept those destroyers here at Gibraltar, Admiral, if that convoy had waited until tomorrow," remarked Copper Guts. "I'm shoving off for Malta in the morning."

A cutting smile twitched Admiral Tyndham's lean lips.

"Really? Don't remember suggesting your leaving so soon."

"You didn't," Copper Guts retorted equably. "I have specific orders to operate as an independent unit of the United States Navy." He bowed pleasantly to his astonished companion. "Any requests from you, sir, for coöperation will always receive my best attention. Otherwise, I shove off when I damned please."

ADMIRAL TYNDHAM'S ears suddenly glowed. But he kept his eyes riveted on the merchant convoy, now more than a mile out and plowing a rippling wake in the glassy Mediterranean.

"Gad!" he exclaimed bitterly. A long arm pointed at the convoy. "There's lesson one, already. Look . . . The *Allen Chine* just stopped an enemy torpedo. A damned Hun sub has potted her. She's sinking by the head. Watch her. And watch five other ships and three British destroyers scuttle off like whipped curs and leave those poor chaps to get sucked under. That's war for you," he flung out through clinched teeth. "Dammit man, don't stand there and imagine there is a single beat of fear in any one of those British hearts! Gad! They're obeying my orders to the letter. Even those chaps drowning won't signal for help, because they know it would tempt the others to turn back and expose themselves to torpedoes."

Copper Guts snatched up a pair of binoculars from the box on the window ledge. The British admiral did likewise. Both men, tight-lipped, watched the stern of the *Allen Chine* climb higher and higher until her propeller beat the air like the death throes of a mortally wounded creature.

The next moment, the sea sucked the torpedoed ship under. Not a survivor could be seen struggling in the wreckage floating on the sullen Mediterranean.

"Went down too soon to launch a single boat." Admiral Tyndham's voice grew thick with tragic pride. "No confusion. But not a man spared to Britain. And, God, how she needs them!"

The hard brown eyes at his side had turned their binoculars from the floating wreckage and picked up the telltale feather of a submarine's periscope.

"There goes another torpedo!" exclaimed Copper Guts. "Sub is right in line with us and that two-funneled ship. The streak is bearing for a boiler room hit. A miracle of seamanship couldn't save her now."

They both watched the swift rush of the torpedo toward the spot where the big cargo ship would be in a few seconds.

"Porter! Porter, for God's sake, old chap," mumbled Admiral Tyndham, un-

conscious that he was voicing his prayer aloud. "Change your course, man!"

"Too late," sighed Copper Guts. "A change now couldn't dodge it."

The distance between the lethal streak and the huge British cargo vessel closed to a foreshortened line on the smooth blue surface.

"*Ah!*" gasped Copper Guts.

It was sheer admiration for the behavior of one of the destroyers. It was evident that the destroyer's commander grasped the hopelessness of signaling the torpedo's intended victim and was taking a desperate chance. The slim war vessel heeled over and then appeared to leap through the water as she hurtled across the path of the torpedo.

For a moment it was not clear to either impotent observer whether the destroyer commander proposed to receive the torpedo in his own hull in order to protect the precious cargo of the merchant ship, or what—

"Look! Look! . . . Look!" His voice choked to a hoarse, triumphant whisper. Admiral Tyndham tried again to speak, but could only point a trembling hand.

In the space of an eye-wink, seemingly, the destroyer cut squarely in front of the racing torpedo. Into water churned to a froth, the delicately adjusted gyroscopes controlling the course of the war machine plunged, missing the stern of the destroyer by scant inches. The torpedo leaped to the surface—porpoising, then went slashing off on an erratic curve, to vanish at last after one high leap above the surface. The British destroyer steamed back to take up her regular position as if nothing had happened.

Copper Guts swept up his cap from the desk and mashed it down over one eye.

"That sub out there is my meat!" he exclaimed. "Just the bone for my pups to cut their eye teeth on. See you later, Admiral!"

Admiral Tyndham snapped annoyed gray eyes around.

"Ten pounds on it you don't even make contact!" he said tartly.

"A bet!" Copper Guts barked over his shoulder and was gone.

IN less than ten minutes he boarded Splinter Boat *9-T-5* with a flying leap from his own barge and was on the tiny bridge in a bound.

"Kelley!" His enthusiastic roar rattled the charthouse windows. "Trice up my pennant. Break out a flag hoist ordering all chasers to sea. There's a Hun sub outside!"

Wild confusion struck Gibraltar harbor until twenty-four splinter boat commanders caught the meaning of the flag hoist burgeoning from the *9-T-5's* signal yard. Then the roar of seventy-two big gasoline motors thundered against the massive rock as the splinter fleet hurtled through the mole, each with all three propellers hurling foam high in the air astern.

A British seaplane buzzed in lazy circles overhead. Closer and closer it tightened its circles until an arm tossed out a white marked buoy that fell away in a sweeping curve to splash on the water below. The seaplane dropped one more marker buoy to indicate the creeping shadow seen far below the surface and then signaled she was out of markers and buzzed off to her base.

A set of flags broke out from Splinter Boat *9-T-5's* signal yard. Almost instantly, the entire splinter fleet pitched to a stop with all engines roaring in reverse. Then absolute silence as S-C tubes were lowered to listen for the submarine.

"Alloh! Alloh!" Copper Guts chanted into the radiophone mike gripped in his fist while he kept his eyes fastened on the last white marker dropped by the seaplane. "Wake up, all of you! Report bearings to me in rotation. But don't jam the air with all hands gabbling at

once. Able Satchel, are you ready to report your S-C bearing on the enemy?"

Able Satchel, the jargon code name for Splinter Boat *7-X-7*, reported handily. She was hearing the submarine on a true bearing of three hundred degrees.

Check. Sign off," snapped Copper Guts. "Now, Dog Rot. Spill it. Spill it, Dog Rot! Give us that bearing."

In rapid succession each chaser reported the direction from which the sound of the retreating submarine came. A series of lines began converging on the chart at Copper Guts' elbow.

Another flag hoist snapped to the rising breeze. The splinter fleet tore ahead for the designated bombing area. Copper Guts focussed his binoculars on a splinter boat in the center of the advancing crescent. A billow of smoke rolled from her engine room hatch.

"The *9-X-2* on fire again," growled Copper Guts.

"Yep. She's a regular fire-bug," remarked the signalman at his elbow. "Every time she starts her engines they backfire and set her ablaze."

Just then Ensign Red Kelley, commanding officer of the *9-T-5*, turned from his station beside the helmsman and spoke to his force commander: "Just plotted our position, sir. In ten minutes at this speed we'll be inside the three-mile neutral zone of the Spanish coast."

Copper Guts darted a quick look at the chart. It was true. The submarine was shooting straight for safety in the three-mile neutral zone. It was simple arithmetic to calculate her almost certain chances for escape.

The signalman at his elbow said: "The *9-X-2* wants permission to jettison her depth mines, sir. Says the fire is threatening her aft magazine."

"That's old Billings, isn't it?" Copper Guts barked at Red Kelley.

"It is, sir," replied Red Kelley with a twisted grin. "And by the looks of things, he's riding a hot one."

"Tell him," Copper Guts instructed his signalman, "to crack on all speed and get well in front before he unloads."

With a snap and flutter of flags the order started for the burning *9-X-2*. Before an O.K. came back, she was already plunging ahead of position.

A grinding crunch from the sea shook Splinter Boat *9-T-5*. Astern of *9-X-2*, a column of water shot skyward. . . . Then another. . . . Four, five, six—double detonations all, as her Y-Gun belched, pitching out two depth mines at right angles.

"Says fire now under control, sir," chanted the signalman to Copper Guts. "Wants to know if he should continue bombing or return to position?"

"Return to position!" snapped Copper Guts. "Tell *9-X-2* he is already in Spanish neutral waters."

"—Periscope two points of the port bow, sir!"

The hail from the crow's nest started both Copper Guts and Red Kelley swinging their binoculars in that direction.

"Range, one thousand!" Red Kelley roared at his waiting gun crew. He turned to his force commander. "Do we commence firing, sir?"

Blood spurted from the lip clinched between Copper Guts' teeth. The muscles on his jaw bulged. He said nothing, but kept his eyes hidden by his binoculars.

"Soundings are shoaling fast," came Red Kelley's relentless prodding. "In a minute he'll broach and start talking back with his guns."

Copper Guts slowly lowered his glasses.

"Do you realize, Kelley," he rasped hoarsely, "what it means if I give the order to fire on an enemy in neutral waters?"

"Damn right I do!" Red Kelley flung back. "You'll be court-martialed and cashiered, sir, by those duty-bound sons-of—" He flung his arm toward the sub-

marine, big hands closing into corded knots. "The thing to do is turn back, Captain. You and me and Billings was shipmates on the old *Shark*. Turn back, Skipper," he begged as the blood left his big clinched fingers under convulsive tension. "Turn back. . . . By God, Billings and I will beat the hell out of any man who even dares think you're yellow! We know it ain't so!"

Suddenly any desire to scale the cliff to an admiral's stars lost all attraction for Copper Guts. Kelley was lying. Lying to himself, trying to convince himself that both he and Billings would feel the same respect for their old skipper of the *Shark* days after this was over—after he had turned tail on the first armed enemy they had met together. Kelley was lying, trying to give him a chance at those admiral's stars.

A heavy fist smote Red Kelley joyously.

"To hell with regulations, you red-necked Irishman! Get that sub!"

"Commence firing!" bellowed Red Kelley instantly.

The stubby three-inch gun on the forecastle of the *9-T-5* whipped back on its recoil slide.

"Missed!" groaned Copper Guts.

"Missed hell, you damn fool!" the signalman flung back over his shoulder. "That's Porky Flynn laying that gun. That gob never misses!"

A hand shot out from a heavily gold-braided sleeve and ripped the quartermaster chevron from the signalman's sleeve. The man stared blankly at the chevron and scrap of torn cloth in Copper Guts' clinched fist.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," stammered the signalman. "I was excited. Didn't know what I was saying. Honest."

"An American sailor must be his coolest in action," said Copper Guts in level, biting tones. Then he shoved the torn chevron back into a limp hand. "Here. Take it back and sew it on again," he said gruffly. "No sense in two of us getting disrated over this."

Before the signalman could stammer his thanks, the roar of the forward gun blasted the words back into his mouth.

"Good work, Flynn!" boomed Copper Guts' deep voice. "Slam him some more, sailor. Five dollars for every hit!"

By that time almost every chaser in the Splinter Fleet was pitching its contribution to the avalanche of shells crashing into the thin, exposed hull of the staggering submarine. Her periscope, clipped by a shell, hung crazily over side. Gaping holes yawned suddenly in her superstructure. And when her gun crews boiled out of her forward hatch, a storm of arriving shells blasted them.

Suddenly the glistening hull seemed to climb right out of the water. Fragments of four bodies catapulted over her bows into the sea.

"She's aground, sir!" yelped Red Kelley exultantly. "Hull her, Flynn! Get one in that forward torpedo magazine!"

Splinter Fleet closed in, angry hornets continuing to stab a helpless enemy. The submarine began disintegrating before Copper Guts' fixed stare.

"Trice up 'Cease Firing'," he ordered the signalman. "Those poor devils in her haven't a rat's chance for their lives."

In the sudden hush that followed, Red Kelley tore his eyes from the shattered hulk and looked hopefully at his commander.

"Do we lay aboard her, like they did in the Old Navy, Cap'n?" He spit into his big fist and gripped his .45 Navy automatic. "How about some prisoners?"

Copper Guts pointed to a revenue cutter bearing down rather timidly with an over-size Spanish ensign flying from her truck.

"No 'Boarders Away' this time, Kelley," he said grimly. "Spain is now asserting her neutrality. She can intern the survivors, according to the usage of war."

WITH the setting sun slanting down over the African coast, the splinter fleet came stemming in double column through the opening in Gibraltar mole. Every British ensign dipped a salute as Splinter Boat *9-T-5* passed down the lane of moored men-o-war with their rails lined by cheering British seamen.

"Yeah," growled Red Kelley scornfully. "Listen at 'em, Cap'n. And this morning when we came in not a rag dipped or a stiff-necked lime-juicer so much as turned his head."

9-T-5 swept past her regular mooring and slid handily alongside the Admiralty landing.

"Shove off, Mr. Kelley, and make your mooring," said Copper Guts from the quay, then turned and walked slowly toward the Admiralty office.

It was a tense, restrained British admiral who greeted Copper Guts halfway up the narrow street leading to the operations office of the British Mediterranean Fleet.

"Think it might rain, captain?" Admiral Tyndham tossed an embarrassed glance up at the cloudless blue sky. "A bit odd, what? I swore I heard it thundering a bit ago. Can you fancy that?"

"Speak a little louder, Admiral," chuckled Copper Guts. "I'm deaf as the devil's door knob for some reason. My diplomatic ear is giving me trouble again, I imagine."

"Righto!" beamed Admiral Tyndham. "And here's that ten quid I wagered with a Yank trader. 'Pon my soul, Captain, though, you've kicked over the whole pot of mutton broth."

"Too late to cry about it," grunted Copper Guts. He tossed a nod at the gray eyes regarding him. "Yes, I know all about that, too. Kissed my commission good-by when I opened fire."

"Saw the whole show from up on the rock," drawled the admiral. "I was hoping, y'know, I could hatch up some sort of an outrageous lie for you—overzealousness of green forces in the war zone or what." Lean fingers stroked his long chin. A restrained British headshake followed. "But your execution was too devastatingly neat. Clockwork, Captain. Deadly efficiency, spoiling any chance to lie like a gentleman for you. Ah, but that chap you sent ahead to stir up the beast with depth mines had a nose like an otter hound! Went belling along, sniffing the dashed beggar's trail right through twenty fathom of water. Ah—say the word and I'll cook up some sort of official prevarication—compass affected by the guns on the rock, throwing you off from your calculated position. How would that sound?"

Copper Guts shook his head.

"Not a chance. I'm cabling the truth to Sams at Plymouth. He can smell a cock-eyed lie from there to Washington. And invent ones that sound better than the Bible, when he feels inspired."

Admiral Tyndham ushered his colleague into his private office and immediately poured a stout jigger in each of two glasses and swizzled them carefully with soda.

"Best I can do, old chap," he said, raising his glass. "Cheerio. I drink to the copper guts of the Yankee Navy." A long finger pointed to the piece of torn ship's plate with a bright fragment of a torpedo imbedded in it. "See that, Captain? Well, that's absolute evidence the sub you polished off a bit ago has been using a Spanish port—neutral country, mind you—as a base of operations. We salvaged that plate from the *Rose of Sharon*. That bit of torpedo warhead sticking in it carries a Spanish arsenal proof mark."

Professional interest distracted Copper Guts' attention from his glass. He stooped for a closer look.

"Certainly is a Spanish government arsenal proofmark, all right enough. No mistake about that," he agreed.

"Positively!" asserted Admiral Tyndham. "Our intelligence people secured

incontrovertible evidence that this German U Boat has been getting munitions and stores regularly from Malaga. Let me show you some pictures to prove it." From a drawer he tossed out a sheaf of snapshots. "Our men snapped these along the waterfront of Malaga. There's the U Boat moored as bold as brass out there in the harbor. These others show German officers and crew swilling beer and lugging torpedoes from a cart to the lighter on the beach."

Copper Guts looked up, puzzled.

"Then why in blazes didn't you slip in there some dark night and blow that sub to hell?"

Admiral Tyndham lifted one eyebrow and shrugged one shoulder.

"I'll tell you why, Captain. Personally, I would have given a leg—right eye and arm in the bargain—if I could have dared do what you did so neatly today. That blighter sank sixteen merchant ships from under my nose. Every time we went after him he scuttled straight for shelter in Spanish waters. It was maddening, no end. But we're British, y'know. And our foreign policy looks beyond this war to the future. We're next-door neighbors of these neutrals. No matter what the provocation, we find it best to shut both eyes and muddle through it."

"I suppose, then," grumbled Copper Guts with an unregenerate gleam in his eye, "His Britannic Majesty is going to be all cut up over this, eh?"

"Oh, frightfully!" chirruped Admiral Tyndham with a solemn wink. "The King will publicly go into a stew over it. The most alarming rash will break out all over his—er, official body, so to speak." A hand suddenly reached out and gripped with most un-British exuberance. "Gad, Captain! For a moment there you had me pitching my cap in the air and cheering you on like a youngster at a cricket match. And by the way—didn't I hear you say you were barging off for Malta in the morning? It would take an awful load from my mind if you would bother convoying six cargo vessels, which are waiting for more of our destroyers that never seem able to come."

SOME days later in Malta, the communications officer of the U. S. S. *Leonidas* placed a decoded cablegram on the desk before Copper Guts. He picked it up and read with with some misgivings.

PURSUANT TO INSTRUCTIONS FORWARDED TO ME FROM WASHINGTON THE FORCE COMMANDER OF SUBMARINE CHASER FORCE DETACHMENT TWO IS HEREBY SEVERELY REPRIMANDED FOR THE FOLLOWING CAUSES. ONE FOR DISPLAYING RECKLESS DARING AND REPREHENSIBLE EFFICIENCY WHEN IN PURSUIT OF AN ENEMY SUBMARINE. TWO FOR INVADING NEUTRAL WATERS OF A FRIENDLY NONCOMBATANT POWER IN SAID PURSUIT. THREE FOR FURTHER VIOLATING SAID NEUTRALITY BY DISPLAYING DEPLORABLE TACTICAL INTELLIGENCE IN BOMBING AN ENEMY SUBMARINE. FOUR IN DESTROYING SAID ENEMY WITH INEXCUSABLY ACCURATE SHELL FIRE. FIVE FOR EXPOSING A FRIENDLY POWER TO EMBARRASSMENT BY CHARGING SAID POWER HAD BEEN DELIBERATELY HARBORING A SUBMARINE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN WARFARE.

SAMS.

The official reprimand was tossed aside with an enigmatic grunt just as Ensign Johnson poked his head into the force commander's cabin.

"Ensign Billings of the *9-X-2* is waiting to report, per your orders, sir."

"Send him in." Copper Guts leaned back in his chair to study the swarthy, hang-dog countenance of Ensign Billings framed in the doorway. "Just how much of a fire was that you had so

damned conveniently back there in Gibraltar, Billings?"

"It was this way, Cap'n," said Billings, hunching his knotty shoulders and fixing innocent eyes on his commander. "Y'see, my engine room crew slopped a quart of oil on a red hot exhaust pipe. I looks back and sees smoke boiling from the hatch. 'You're on fire, sailor,' I says to myself, 'and you'd better get rid of them ash cans aft before you ride one to the clouds.'" Billings gulped shamelessly and squinted with frank camaraderie as one old salt to another. "So I signals for your permission to jettison my ash cans, and I gets it—"

"Hold on there!" growled Copper Guts. "Avast heaving till I get this straight. You asked to jettison dangerous explosives because you were on fire, didn't you?"

"Aye, aye, sir," agreed Billings. "Just like I said, Cap'n. That's just what I done."

"You certainly did!" snapped Copper Guts. "Only you pulled the safety forks from those depth mine firing pins and dumped live ones over board instead of duds. Were you instructed to do *that?*"

"Geeze, I did, didn't I?" frowned Billings. "Yeah, I thought them ash cans acted kind of funny. Uh-huh, that's what musta shoved the sub's tail up, I guess."

"Billings," rumbled Copper Guts with a perfectly straight face. "I am deeply pained that one of my officers, a man I personally recommended for a commission, should be so outrageously careless in interpreting and carrying out orders in the presence of the enemy. Billings, consider yourself reprimanded. Does that penetrate that thick skull of yours?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" agreed Billings cheerfully. Unabashed, he pulled a requisition from his pocket and pinned it flat to the desk with two broad thumbs. "Can you sign this now, Cap'n? I'm eight ash cans short. Didn't have time to draw 'em before we shoved off from Gib. Jeese, but I felt nervous as a bride all the way here to Malta about it—figgered I might jump another sub and be short presents for him."

In grave silence, Copper Guts signed the requisition. He watched Billings leave, walking with that queer, hitching roll long years of service fasten upon an enlisted man.

"We have now officially passed the buck in regular Navy style," Copper Guts remarked to Ensign Johnson. He tossed the cablegram across the desk. "File this with the rest of the communications."

Johnson fumbled with the cablegram, tried to move his feet without result; then braced his shoulders.

"That other cable, sir. . . . It's none of my damned business, I know. But—well, Washington had no right to dock you another fifty numbers on the promotion list. And docked you for what?" Boyish eyes flamed their indignation. "Yes, for doing what the English are giving you their D.S.O. for. It—it makes a man almost ashamed of his country, sir!"

"Tut!" said Copper Guts. "Get things straight in your head, son. They are sticking that D.S.O. on me for the valuable information I gave Admiral Tyndham about using the new Mark Four depth mines—sinking that sub was just an unfortunate incident in their eyes. The English were appreciative of the principle, not the example."

"But Washington—look what they did! The English would have made you a full admiral, sir, for it."

Copper Guts trained a quelling brown eye on his aide.

"The English, son, would have crucified me—then buried my remains in Westminster Abbey. Now clear out and mind your own business!"

SUN HUNGER

By Captain Frederick Moore

COME out upon the high road and go farin' south with me
Across the snowy mountains down river towards the sea,
For you are tired o' fact'ry towns, and I am sick o' farms
We hunger for the tropic ports, blue coral reefs and palms.

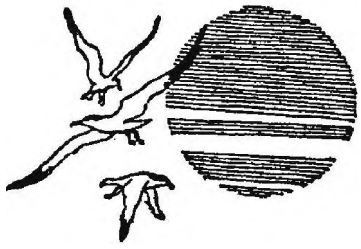
THESE pines cry out to mast tall ships, they grew for mains'l booms,
They'll know no wind but that which blows to clatter from the looms;
Our legs are stiff with winds that blow from Old Man's granite face,
Our bones they whine in anguish for a beach that's froth'd with lace.

WE'LL find a sky that's cut across by heav'n huntin' spars,
We'll heave our loaded seabags to a squarehead name o' Lars,
We'll ship aboard a schooner but we won't ask where she's bound
We'll find ourselves in Trinidad or Fortune Island Sound.

COME down with me to Salvador—or Saba's seethin' sky,
We'll set the jibs for Gran' Cayman and steer her full and by;
Run south to Dollar Harbor with a norther on our track,
From Rum Cay down to Hogstye Reef, then up for Great Abac'.

PUT Long Key on our sta'board bow, Key West a port o' call—
The Gulf Stream's raisin' hob again—stow canvas in a squall.
We'll run the coast o' Cuba down to Maysi's friendly light
To a Wind'ard Passage hurricane that hits us in the night.

GREEN breakers at the Virgins—or Bermuda's chalky flanks,
A sniff o' steamin' jungles comin' up Bahama Banks;
The music o' the Westerlies, the joy o' mornin' wheel,
A landfall just at sunrise as the gulls begin to squeal.



WE KNOW a hundred spiggy ports, we've smelled the Morro's tides,
We've chipp'd a hundred tramper's plates—we've chipp'd the chains besides;
We know the fruiter's gallant lift, the gunboat's sullen rolls—
We've quit a coaster off the Capes with her bottom full o' holes.

GO GATHER up your sea-gear, lad! Pack all the bag will hold,
There's a hooker in from Haiti and the old gray mare is sold;
We want no more o' fact'ry towns, we'll have no more o' plows—
We'll put blue water under us with a porpoise at the bows.

YOU'VE a milkmaid on the mountain? Yes, I know, but what o' that?
There's a gal at Dry Tortooga with your name writ in her hat;
Take that little Spanish lady who put out the yellow wine—
What are milkmaids in the mountains to the gals below the Line?

SO WHY should bosuns hesitate and why should third mates lag
In a land o' snowy mountains when *dinero's* in the bag?
When there's jade hills in Jamaica, with rum in Kingston Bay—
An anchor watch at Port Morant—say, matey, on our way!

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

RAY MILLHOLLAND'S story of the splinter boats calls for some explanations—first about Ray Millholland himself, whose yarn enlists him in our Writers' Brigade. He says:

Too thick-headed to steer clear of trouble—I guess that labels me from that April Fool's Day in 1894 when things first started happening to me.

And when I was six years old, they had to chase out on the prairies, take an old Civil War musket away from me, and drag me off to school. They went on dragging me to school for years after that, but every spare minute I could call my own, I was outdoors again with either a gun or a fishing line in my pistol pocket.

During my later school days, I took a little fling one summer as a logger, helping the camp cook and riding the tail end of a six-foot felling saw. Then I went on to learn the machinist trade as a preparation for the family plans to make a mechanical engineer out of me. But when I got to college, I liked fooling with explosive chemicals better than chasing the cosine of Angle BCA. Well, I wound up that part of my education in short order and grabbed a job as plant metallurgist for a Diesel engine factory.

Then trouble started down on the Mexican Border in 1916, and I just had to get mixed up in that. I enlisted in the National Guard as an Artificer—arms repair mechanic—and had just got my battalion sergeant-major's stripes when the big show started for Uncle Sam in dead earnest. Gosh, I had to be an aviator, but the Army was full of gosh-I-want-to-be-an-aviators so I wangled a transfer to the aviation section of the Navy. No dice, the Navy didn't have any crates for me to smash up, but the Navy did have a raft of submarine chasers and no experienced engine mechanics to run them. I got chummy with the man who sent persons to the submarine chasers and wound up as chief engineer of one. And there I stuck during the whole war, shoving at a splinter boat's throttles from Norfolk to the Adriatic and back again.

That's the part I have always wondered about—why I kept coming back every time, when common sense ought to tell a man he should be planted for keeps. It doesn't make sense.

After the war I tried designing machinery for a while. Then I took a job as works manager of a Diesel engine plant. And did I have fun for a couple of years! The president of the Diesel engine company was Clessie Cummins, as near my twin brother as two birds can possibly be. We built Diesel engines and shipped them all over the world. That wasn't enough; we had to build lighter and more powerful Diesels than anybody else. So we started in making an oil burner that could be put into a race car. We did, and that buggy stood the world on its ear when it went whizzing through the Five-Hundred Mile Race at Indianapolis one year without a stop. The job didn't win first place, but it opened a new era for Diesel engines with a shout.

Well, the fun wore off in a few years and

I tried my hand at building and selling high production machinery for the automobile factories. And I was riding high when Black Friday of '29 came along and left me stranded with a growing family on my hands, no job, and no nickels.

And here I am, after being a chemist, a doughboy, a sailor, a works manager, a vice-president of something or other, having the time of my life telling the damnedest lies about what I have seen and heard during those bumpy years stretching behind me.

Settled down now? O sure! I've got a job now that will take me at least fifty years to finish, providing I don't fall off some mountain ledge hunting bighorns or drown my fool self in some ice cold trout stream. But those three boys of mine—Bob, Jim, and Mac—they keep a man dead broke buying them guns, fishing tackle and ammunition. I'll have to quit gassing and get back to plotting another splinter boat yarn.

WHEN I read the story I wrote Millholland: "What about Admiral Sams? Is he Admiral Sims?"

"He is, and he isn't," was the reply, and it is quite apparent the author is an admirer of Admiral Sims. He writes about his story's historical background as follows:

That a German submarine did base in a Spanish port near Gibraltar and did raid the Allied convoys entering and leaving that port, *is* history. And the Splinter Fleet did bomb the beggar in a wild rough house. Whether we sank it or not is something I have never been able to substantiate by documentary evidence. But the Splinter Fleet did hear about invading neutral waters on one occasion. I strung the various incidents together and made a story of pure fiction out of it.

As far as Sims goes, he did not cable the reprimand (?) as I tell it, not in any such words, anyway. But the act was characteristic of the Stormy Petrel of the Navy, and it was just such an attitude and just such type of slam-bang leadership Sims displayed in directing the American anti-submarine campaign in the war zone that made him the most colorful American admiral of the war.

"The Navy can't shoot for beans" wrote Sims.

It is accepted in Navy circles that Admiral Sims's rise dated from that historic letter he wrote, after the Spanish American War, directly to President Theodore Roosevelt. Right in the face of popular pride in the Navy's gunnery as exemplified in the naval battles we won, Sims proved by carefully prepared statistics that the percentage of hits in relation to the number of shots fired by American naval guns during the Spanish American War, and in subsequent target practice, was far below the gunnery efficiency necessary to guarantee victory against a first class naval power.

President Roosevelt, in his characteristic way, jumped at this penetrating criticism Sims presented and gave him the job of improving the Navy's gunnery. After that, promotion was rapid.

And Ray Milholland quotes "Washington Close-Ups," by Edward G. Lowry:

"It raised a rumpus. Roosevelt brought Admiral Sims home from China and put him in charge of the Navy's target practice.

"'Do exactly as he says for eighteen months,' said Roosevelt. 'If he does not accomplish something in that time, fire him.'"

THE diving equipment used in the painting on the cover of this issue was supplied to Hubert Rogers by John Turner, veteran commercial diver.

Little can be said about this lean, vital, blue-eyed Yankee salvager, whose father and grandfather before him were divers, that has not already been published in New York newspapers and syndicated throughout the country, for his is a unique record.

For forty years he has been paid to go to the bottom and retrieve anything from a needle to an anchor. Raising ships, building bridges, laying pipelines, and the more sinister and gruesome assignments of the New York City police. These are among the diversified reasons for John Turner to climb into his heavy, rubberized suit and bronze helmet and bring to the surface that which the sea has claimed.

Once he worked at a depth of 184 feet which at that time was a commercial record and, I think, still is. Navy divers have gone deeper, as Commander Ellsberg told us in the last issue, but extend-

ed work is hardly possible in such tremendous depths.

While at work raising *H. M. S. Scorpion*, sunk in Bermuda waters, John Turner was caught under some heavy timbers. It took the combined efforts of all the men on the job thirty-two hours to get him to the surface. His longest dive!

When asked what was his worst scare and his toughest job, his answer is typical of the answers of most of those who lead dangerous and adventurous lives.

"All the jobs are tough ones. Scared? Why, I'm scared all the time! Swim? No. I never did learn to swim and—do you know, that's something I've always wanted to do."

HERE go a couple of Marines shooting at each other. I couldn't presume to settle their differences, but I'm going to be glad to see another yarn as good as "He Walked to War."

For twenty years I have been a reader of *Adventure*—does that entitle me to have a voice of—shall we say—objection—this one time? Anyhow, I feel that I'm more or less qualified in writing you this one time.

In your October issue there was a story by an individual named L. Ron Hubbard—which concerns Nicaragua chiefly. In his biography in the Camp-Fire, he claims to have been a top kick in the Corps.

Top kicks aren't made over-night in the Corps and they generally are real soldiers. I venture to state the average top kick has over sixteen years of service. However, that's beside the point. What I object to principally is that a colonel of Marines doesn't talk over a field phone to a line sergeant except in cases of extreme emergency. Transfers are routine, and colonels, even in Nicaragua, aren't particularly interested in them.

Another thing, who ever heard of a telephone in the Pantasma Valley even when the 11th Regiment was there? Also, does the Pantasma parallel the Honduras border? I thought it was in Jinotega and Segovia. I had a roaming patrol in Jinotega and I can remember a miserable five months in Santa Cruz—that happens to be in the Pantasma. That was a swell post, no trails and the Cocoa river in the front door, two houses in the "town" and rain nine months a year. Just showers, the other three—yeah, I know the Pantasma.

To get on—"E. Z.'s" patrol on the line was just fiction. Five men patrols just weren't in that area! Also every patrol had at least ONE automatic weapon. "E. Z." certainly was some shot—how come he wasted two shots at 75 yards with a .45? That's hard to swallow.

Real Marines didn't call the natives "Gooks" and believe me you those "Gooks" had guts! Try'n scare 'em!

Once there was a Marine repair patrol that left Ocotal with ten men to repair the line between Ocotal and San Fernando. The time—December 30, 1930, and two hours later the patrol had 100 per cent casualties. That's rather high even for Nicaragua. How about it?

In case Hubbard doesn't know it they just don't fly without 'chutes, especially in Nicaragua.

As for bread in the "hills" among the natives, tortillas were and are the only bread they use.

I served in Nicaragua almost four years. Over three of that time I was in Teniente Primero in the Guardia. I've been on duty in Managua, Granada, Masaya, Leon, Chontales, Rivas, Matagalpos, Jinatega, Esteli, Segavia, Bluefields, Puerto Cabezas, Neptune Mines, Prinzapolka and the Tuma. I was one of the survivors of the Jicano mutiny—and have been in eighteen contacts (legitimate). I'm still in the Corps and probably will be 'til it's my time to cash in.

—ANOTHER TOP KICK,
Washington, D. C.

I am always somewhat amused when a first sergeant lets out a regulation growl. First sergeants most always take matters entirely too seriously.

Now the former aide to General Butler in China thought the yarn was okay as to detail. He did tell me that that telephone line was somewhat out of place, but in *"He Walked to War"* the line ran to Pantasma, not across it.

The sergeant, as he is down there in Washington, might go up to the Navy Department and look up the records of the 20th regiment. He'll find Lafayette Ronald Hubbard duly warranted a first sergeant. If he's got the nerve, he might also call up Major Moriarity, the great Mo, and find out that I've been kicking around with the Corps ever since I was a pup, officially and otherwise.

Marines called the goonies goonies, not

gooks. The sergeant forgot to follow his text. That is, when Marines didn't call them worse.

About Easy's patrol, you see he heard about the patrol that left Octotal and had 100 per cent casualties and he wasn't taking any chances. Besides, it wasn't a five man patrol. It was a squad.

As for flying without 'chutes, I might refer the sergeant to the Department of Commerce. He'll find me listed down there, at present under a permit, but formerly under a license. If the sergeant ever did much flying, he'd fail to appreciate a 'chute. Three Marine pilots I know personally have a habit of forgetting the things. Regulations to the contrary.

The sergeant mentions that the natives had no bread in the hills and then says that "tortillas were and are the only bread they use." So what? Tortillas, may I remind the sergeant, according to his own confession, are doughy bread, listed as bread, called pan as well as tortilla. "A doughy bread was baking on the crude charcoal stove."

I like top kicks. They're the backbone of the corps, and a Marine first sergeant is far more important than an army top. You know, the skipper always sees his company through the eyes of his first sergeant and upon that first sergeant everything depends. If it weren't for top kicks, the Corps' record would be far less enviable. A first sergeant owes his ability to the fact that he can growl lovely, and after years of practice, growling becomes second nature. I have never seen a first sergeant who wouldn't growl and I never will. They are very jealous of their Corps and have a right to be. After all, they *are* the Corps.

Give my best wishes to the sergeant.

—L. Ron Hubbard

A WHILE back an ex-Legionnaire reader, writing that he enjoyed the strict accuracy of the Legion yarns of Georges Surdez, hinted nevertheless that he had caught Surdez in his first mistake. "Only in one instance did Surdez slip up —when he stated that the Lebel uses a loading clip of five cartridges for the rifle, and three for the carbine. It's the other way around." The letter appeared in Camp-Fire, and Surdez writes:

The letter from comrade J. Arthur, in Camp-Fire, gave me a lot of pleasure. After all, the striving for accuracy of details is aimed to please those familiar with scene and characters, and a note of approval shows success. Legionnaire Arthur (once a Legionnaire, always a Legionnaire) treated me so generously—I am aware that he and many others could pick flaws in my stories—that I hesitate to mention the one point on which he does not agree. He is right, as a matter of fact, but I am not altogether wrong.

There are two models of Lebels using clips, the *Mle-1907-1915*, which uses clips with three cartridges, and the *Mle-1907-1915 M 1916*, which uses five cartridges in its clips. It is possible to tell those models apart at a glance, as the *Mle-1907-1915 M 1916* has a metal protection shield shaped like a box above the trigger-guard, which is lacking in the earlier model. Both models are manufactured in both rifle and carbine, and it merely happens that all the rifles I handled used the five-clip, all the carbines used the three-clip.

A COMRADE wrote in a query on ship's rigging after reading Bill Adams' yarn "The Golden Emblem." I forwarded his letter to Dutch Flat, and Bill Adams sends me this reply:

Many thanks for the letter from Mr. W. H. Hurdle; an old hunk of deep-water salt horse evidently. I am glad there are a few of us left. We are dropping out a bit too fast for my liking. In the past few years I've lost a half dozen old sailing skippers who were good pals. It leaves a void that will not ever be filled; that cannot be. For the breed of sailing ship men was a breed to itself; with ways of its own, thoughts of its own, a philosophy of its own—and a good one too. The chaps who go to sea today in steam live very, very different lives. Life is, doubtless, better for the man who goes to sea today—in many ways. He doesn't eat maggoty hardtack; nor putrid pork; and he rarely has to stay on deck soaked to the bone for a matter of 24 hours or so at a time. But in other ways his life is less pleasant than was ours. He never knows the feel of the sea. Any old sailing ship man will know what I mean; but the steam man won't. I've been in steam myself. And even in a steamer of small tonnage, in heavy weather, the feeling was not there.

As regards the ship *Kinnaird* in my story. She was 440 tons net register. Her full name was the *Lord Kinnaird*. I was aboard her in '97 or '98. To a chap who went aboard her from a vessel of 1777 tons net register it was rather like going aboard a doll's ship. But

she was all there. She went round the Horn to Portland and was something of a curiosity there to the chaps from the big ladies. There were many fine ships there—*Euphrosyne*, *Matterhorn*, *Patriarch* (the old wool clipper), *Mooltan*, *City of Athens* (so old they dare not chip her sides to get the rust off lest the chipping hammers go through; so scoured her with sand and canvas), *Hougomont*, on her maiden voyage, a big clumsy tub of great tonnage (dismasted a year or two ago—and then used as part of a breakwater on the South Australian coast), *Nivelle*, her sister ship, the splendid Welsh clipper *Province*, the *Lady Isabelle*,—and what's the use of talking? Not one left today!

The little *Lord Kinnaird* did have buntlines rove off on her royals. Or one might perhaps better call them leechlines. There was one to port, one to starboard. They were about as thick as a clothes line.

As regards a sea cock in her forward well, I won't be sure about that. Very likely, quite probably, there was not such a thing. I doubt if there was. I ought perhaps to have given her a few hundred tons more.

Things were done so very differently in different ships. Of course one must be careful to be exact. For instance I read a few days ago in a book that is very famous of a "brig running under her jibs only"—running with the wind astern under jibs only. And she was in a big hurry too!

I may have told you before of the time I was up for a second mate's ticket. The examiner, once skipper of a wool clipper, seemed to have a vast desire that no young chap just out of his apprenticeship should pass the exam. But I wiggled through my navigation safely. And then next day I wiggled through my seamanship, with the old boy looking grouchy as the very devil each time I gave a correct answer to his questions. When he had put me through the mill till it seemed that I did know my business, he suddenly brightened up. The old codger asked me one more question. A very odd question I thought it. He wanted me to name the sails of a full rigged ship. Why, a kid at sea for two weeks should do that with no trouble. So I started on the foremast and worked aft, naming the square sails; then came forward naming the fore and afters. Soon I came to the head sails—fore topmast staysail, inner jib, outer jib, flying jib, jib topsail—and when I said 'jib topsail' the old boy's grey hair riz up like a dog's hair, his eyes flashed. "What do you mean by jib topsail? There's no such sail!" he chortled, thinking that he had me at last. And I actually had to explain to that old wool clipper skipper who must have seen hundreds of ships in his day how a jib topsail set. He'd never seen one. The ship I served my apprenticeship in always carried one. It set on the fore royal stay, with a very long tack. It was a nuisance to us apprentices too. But there it was. It just goes to show that things were done one way in one ship, another in another. And yet one has to be careful, of course. I saw a picture of a ship once with the yards abaft the mast! And sometimes I read a sea story that is utterly impossible. I'll write a line to Hurdle, of course, and thank him for his letter and have a good little old gam about old days when things were not in such a steaming, gasoline-driven, everlasting rush; and commerce relied on wind in white canvas.

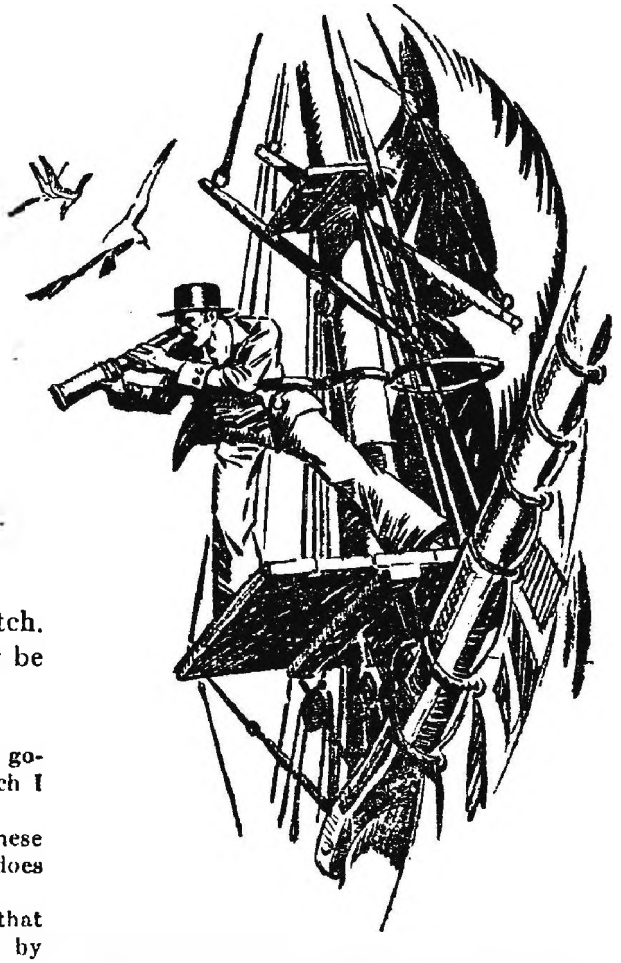
There was certainly a sea cock in the forward well in some of the big sailing ships. No question at all of that. I remember it. Cheerio!

YOU will recall an article by Wynant Davis Hubbard on his experiences with lions that we had in our magazine last year. I noted then in Camp-Fire that he was going to Ethiopia on the war correspondence staff of a large chain of papers, and that I hoped to have some of his experiences told here. He has just returned after six months in Ethiopia. He was in Dessye when the first bombing fleet appeared over the mountains, was there through a double bombardment, helping in the fight against incendiary chemicals, aiding with the wounded and dying—and his account of it is the kind of graphic writing that pours out of a man who is in the grip of a tremendous experience. It's too long for Camp-Fire, and I am scheduling it as a fact article for the next issue. And I'm not going to edit it at all—he dodged enough bombs to have a right to see his own views and convictions about the Ethiopian war, and those of other newspapermen with him, appear in print untouched at an editorial desk that never was the target of a bombing raid.

H. B.

Ask Adventure

information you can't get elsewhere



NO furnace to tend, no train to catch. But that tropic island home may be a sizzling hot place to live.

Request:—What are the possibilities of going native on the Galapagos Islands, which I believe belong to Ecuador?

Is there any chance of reaching these islands by regular steamship service or does one have to sail one's own boat there?

I remember reading some time ago, that some of these islands are already settled by a group of white men, mostly Germans. Is there any way of corresponding with them? Does one require a passport to settle on these islands? What would a tired business man take along if he wanted to spend the rest of his years there?

What other countries would you suggest for the retired business man?

Between here and Panama there are a number of Republics. Which of these are not too particular about immigration laws?

—George Jedicke, Woodland, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Seymour Pond:—I do not believe the Galapagos Islands are the islands you are seeking on which to spend restful days. In the first place they are primarily a hell furnace of heat. They are just under the equator, six hundred lonely miles over the Pacific horizon from the civilized coast of Ecuador. The coasts of the Galapagos Isles are sterile, treeless, sun-scorched, and covered with hard stone lava on which cavort to their lonely heart's content, poisonous reptiles, lizards, and a great, almost prehistoric, land tortoise (the *Testudo indica, elephantina*). It is this rare tortoise which almost solely has brought man to the shores of the islands.

Rain *never* has been known to fall, I understand, on the shores of the Galapagos Islands. The vertical rays of the torrid sun blaze down on those lava-seared rocks to an unbearable temperature. It rains on the peaks of the mountains which are wrapt in almost impenetrable jungle. I can think of almost no place in the Tropics where man's life could be more unhappy than on any of the Galapagos Islands. No, my friend, I do not believe you have your compass pointed to the right spot.

You may recall that a few years back a German, Lorenz I believe was his name, and several other associates, formed a little colony out there. Most of their bodies were found on those emblazoned lava-roasting stones, their skins almost charred to a crisp by that merciless sun, radiating upward by the flaming stones under them. It was not a pretty story, but one filled with pathos, smashed hopes, and battered dreams burned out by that hellfire of the torrid latitudes.

There are plenty of attractive places to hie oneself to in the American Tropics. Two of the most charming I have found were in Panamá. One in the mountains eleven thousand feet among the heaven-washed clouds of the Tropics—in El Volcan region a few hundred miles north of Panamá City. Here,

you can sit on a gorgeous mountain peak and gaze across the broad blue Pacific dotted with sapphire islands and let your eyes rest on the dim cobalt horizon afar. There is splendid hunting—deer, pheasant, and many other edible animals. The nights are cool for sleep, the days are delightful in tropical charm and warmth. It is a land where one will lengthen one's days and not shorten them as they would on the desolate Galapagos. At El Volcan you are cut off from the world to all intents and purposes; you are there, alone on the jungle heights with the Singer-in-the-Winds, the cry of the howling monkey, and at night, the shriek of the puma, or the roar of a jaguar. You need never leave there unless you wish. But should you wish, in a few hours the winding trail down the mountains will take you into the picturesque little Spanish-like villages of the llano lands. You can reach the heights of El Volcan from La Concepcion just up from David on the Pacific, reaching David by small coasting schooner out of Panamá City.

You need no passport to go to Panamá. You can own land in the Volcan region, and at an astonishingly low cost. You will find no difficulty in settling yourself in this Eden land due to the fine relationships existing between Panamá and the United States.

Should you go to Ecuador, and the Galapagos, you will need a passport, and a medical certificate; that is, health certificate from a certified physician, and a vaccination certificate. Men of a religious faith other than Protestant are not admitted to Ecuador without the special permission of the government. Visa is $1.00 and good for one year.

You ask me what should a tired business man take along with him to one of these places with the idea of spending his years there. I am not trying to be facetious when I say a woman. Of course, I know you refer to more, should I say, mechanical things. This would depend on the final place you choose. If you go to an island, then your own boat, staple foods (salts, flour, seeds, tools such as hatchets, wheelbarrow, hoes, rakes, nails, matches, etc.) If you went to El Volcan, a mule, again gardening tools, staple foods, firearms, ammunition, clothing of a light, durable nature, etc. I will be glad to go into greater detail with you on this subject, if you pick out a spot and advise me about it.

I am sorry to have to write you so discouragingly about the Galapagos Islands, but I must tell only truth or your final fate would rest on my soul. I am sure that you can get a steamer to put you off at one of the Galapagos Islands, if you could obtain the permission of the Ecuadorian Government to go there which is doubtful now after the last unfortunate ending of the German colony. It is my understanding that a steamer stops there once a month to inspect the port on Chatham and keep a windward eye out for possible shipwrecked souls who might unfortunately land there. You can find out definitely by writing the American Consulate, Guayaquil, Ecuador.

The Panamanian Government is really most friendly and cooperative and you will experience few difficulties going into the interior of Panamá, or on one of her coastal islands.

There is one island called Montuosa Islet, belonging to Panamá, and about sixty miles off the coast and thirty miles from Great Coiba, (westward). It appealed to me as one of the most gorgeous small islands I ever expect to see. It rises to a height of some five hundred feet above the blue waters, has a reef that runs out to the westward about three miles offering some protection for a small boat. The shore line is beautiful white sand. The slopes of the island rise abruptly from the sea into lush jungle verdury of emerald green, that five hundred feet. I used to gaze at that island from the bridge of a freighter when I was a mate and wonder if I'd ever get ashore there. I remember the coast pilot book said some little creeks emptied into the lagoon from between the rocks, so I judged that there was fresh water on the island. The island is small, not over four or five miles across and a man there could certainly be king of his domain. I think it might be worth investigating. One could get to Montuosa from the port of Pedregal, Panamá, by hiring a small sailing vessel to take him there, or sailing one's own boat across. The distance is roughly fifty-five to sixty-five miles from Pedregal, directly out to sea.

It would be healthier, I believe, in the heights over El Volcan and life would be less cramped and confining than on an island. There would be better hunting and medical aid if needed. If one is fascinated, however, with the island idea, I think Montuosa would be an ideal and glamorous little islet on which to live and certainly a Paradise compared to Galapagos in a thousand ways. There are many other islands, too, off the coast of Panamá that are charming, where there is water, and wild life and uninhabited such as some of Las Perlas, Las Secas, and La Parida—a lifetime finer than those lonely hells of the far off Galapagos. The best way would be to have or hire a small sailing vessel and explore those islands off the coast of Panamá, a thing not difficult to accomplish. Good luck to you, and if I can be of any further

service kindly call on me. And lastly, I would implore you, forget you ever heard the word Galapagos!

ON the banks of the Magdalena—you still have string quartets a la mode.

Request:—I have to go to Colombia, on the upper Magdalena River to be exact, to be there some months, and as this is to be a bit more deluxe affair than my usual trips, I thought I might take a radio with me.

Would you be so kind as to recommend a make of receiver that would give satisfactory reception (of broadcasts) under the above conditions? It won't have to stand much abuse other than boat travel and several transfers. Of course the less wood and fabric the better, due to the temperature and the humidity. A simple metal case would be the best.

S. A. MEWHIRTER, Glenwood Springs, Colo.

Reply by Mr. D. McNicol:—I'd get one of the new all-wave receivers. They cost little more than ordinary 200-500 meter sets. You will have to use a battery set presumably. General Electric, Philco and Atwater Kent have such sets on the market now. You should be able to get one in Denver.

If the wood cabinet is objectionable you can have a sheet-iron box made for the chassis. Some fellows have done this who are in the hills of South America. Modern Burgess or Columbia dry batteries are very dependable and last a year.

A WORLD WAR hero who deserved world renown—General Eduard Fischer.

Request:—Recently I met a man who was born in Bucovina, Austria, and during our conversation about the World War this man made some statements which seem pure invention to me.

I do not recall his exact statements, but the following is the gist of it and I would appreciate it very much if you could give me some information about it. This man came to the United States shortly after the War and to my way of thinking, this is a long time to remember such things. Well, here goes:

He stated that at the very beginning of the war, in 1914 that is, there were no Austrian troops at all where he lived. Only a small force of police. He says that the country was defended by these police under the command of a few officers against several Russian armies for almost two years and that the Russians were soundly beaten.

I have looked up in the library such data as I could find and there is nothing to bear out these statements. Furthermore, I do not believe that a few "police" can hold up armies! I said that much, but the man assured me that such was the fact and was willing to bet any amount of money that he was speaking the truth. I don't want to bet; I don't want to take his money.

I would appreciate it very much if you could help me prove to this fellow that he's talking through his hat.

—Walter H. Johnston

Reply by Mr. Beda von Berchem:—Your friend is absolutely right!

The Bucovina was an Austrian province before and during the war, now part of Roumania. After the Austrian order for mobilization was issued, the regular troops in that province were ordered to Galicia and the defense of the country was left in the hands of the gendarmes. Their commander was, then, Major Eduard Fischer, not an Army Officer, but an officer of the gendarmes or State Police. With this small force and a handful of customs guards, Major Fischer prevented the Russians (not several armies, but a very large force, twenty times superior to his own forces) from entering.

The story of the defense of the Bucovina reads like a chapter from a fairy tale, but is true, nevertheless. Fischer was promoted to Colonel over the head of many superiors and was later made a Brigadier General. In his encounters with superior Russian forces (by winter 1914-1915 he had about six thousand men, including peasant volunteers who were unfit for regular army service) he always came away victor. He could not prevent the occupation of the capital, Czernowitz, but he drove the Russians out again. He held the country for over a year until regular army troops arrived.

So, you see, that fellow was not talking through his hat at all.

Incidentally, and as a strange coincidence, just a few days before your letter came, General Fischer died in Vienna and his book "War without an Army" is now in print. General Fischer was the man who supplied Vienna with food in 1918. Naturally, all Bucovina looked up to him and worshipped him.

A DIETARY problem: how to feed a toad until he goes to sleep.

Request:—My sister, who lives in New Mexico, sent us a horned toad a few months ago, and recently a person in this city who received one in connection with some chain

letter scheme, pursuaded my wife to take the toad off her hands. So now we have two of the creatures to care for and it is quite a task.

The toad which my sister sent, is quite handsome. Its color is a pinkish tan, and it has many black markings. The horns, or spikes on its head seem to be divided, with a series of four on each side. The other is a dull dust color, is much smaller, and the spikes run in a continuous circle around the back of the head. Is this difference in the toads due to sex or species?

We keep the animals in a small metal tub, with about two or three inches of sand on the bottom, occasionally letting them out for a run, and they certainly can run. A science teacher gave us a supply of flour worms which we fed for a time, but the toads' appetites have quite outdistanced the worms' speed of propagation, so that now the worms are conspicuous by their absence. We are now feeding grasshoppers. The larger toad will take them from our fingers, but they must be stunned and then agitated with a straw before the smaller toad will eat them. We have been feeding them four or five hoppers a day each, but that will have to cease with the coming of frost and we do not know how we will be able to feed the animals then. Can you suggest something?

They are quite interesting, and we would like to keep them, providing we would be able to keep them alive through the winter. Otherwise we will ship them back to New Mexico.

Any suggestions as to their feeding and care during the winter would be very thankfully received.

—Edward G. H. Nichols, Saratoga Springs, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—Very likely you have two distinct species of *Phrynosoma*. The one from New Mexico sounds much more interesting than the other which probably is *the* common species, *P. cornutum*. Since three kinds are found in New Mexico, it is hard to say which kind you have from there. About fourteen species are known in the western United States where they are common.

Apparently you have fed your specimens well so they should live through the winter with much less feeding, say once a week. Keep them in a warm room and give them water sprinkled on leaves to drink. Give them meal worms to eat.

DOES any reader know the answer to this one?

Request:—I've been interested in knife throwing for years (since 1929 as a professional entertainer) and have tried to find out through various sources if there has ever been any authentic record of a person being wounded or killed by a thrown knife in a fight. I've seen a number of people stuck and been stuck myself *but* only during an exhibition.

Mr. Robert E. Gardner, the *Ask Adventure* expert on Edged Weapons knows of no such instance and believes it entirely impractical.

Perhaps during your law enforcement work you have chanced upon an incident of this kind and if so I would really be pleased to hear of it.

—Frank D. Dean, San Jose, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Francis H. Bent:—Sorry that I can't help you out any in your quest for information concerning knife throwing in fighting.

I've neither heard of, read about, or witnessed any casualties resulting from a thrown knife in combat. Nor do I know of anyone who has.

Of course, one may sometimes *hear* of such things, but it always boils down to a rumor and the actual facts or proof are missing.

THERE'S gold in the great white waste.

Request:—I would like some information on Etah, near Ellesmere Land, and also upon any other settlement near Etah, especially in Grant Land. I would also like some information on the country around McPherson and Great Bear Lake, in the Northwest Territories.

—George Hacket, Louisville, Ky.

Reply by Mr. H. Patrick Lee:—You've probably heard so much about Etah, at one time or another, that you imagine it to be quite a place. I was there in 1923 and again in 1924. At that time there were only a couple of families living at Etah. In fact, one family really lived at Annoytuk, which is just north of Etah and the most northerly permanent habitation in Greenland.

The natives there live in rock and bone igloos, and only build snow huts when traveling. Likewise in summer they use skin *tupiks* when away on hunting expeditions.

Etah was a busy place at the time of Peary's assaults on the Pole. He used it as a sort of base, assembling his Eskimo dog-drivers and their families there before going north to Cape Columbia. Cook, Harry Payne Whitney and others spent some time at Etah.

Its importance lies in the fact that it is the most northern harbor on the west coast of Greenland where one can reasonably hope to enter by ship every year. Kane Basin and Kennedy Channel usually are blocked with heavy ice. In 1923 we tried to cross to Cape Sabine in the *C.G.S. Arctic* but couldn't get through the ice; Donald MacMillan, whose *Bowdoin* lay in Ltah harbor while we were there, had also failed to get across.

Cape Alexander (Nilky to the Eskimos) is generally free from ice, even in winter, owing to the strong currents and is a great place for walrus hunting. There is a small settlement near Alexander but the occupants are nomadic and may not be there for months at a time.

The same holds true of all the settlements from Cape York north to Etah. The huts, built stoutly of rock and whalebone, tamped with sod, are more or less community property, and Eskimos traveling up and down the coast, to and from the Danish trading post at Oomanak (North Star Bay) make use of them at will.

Cut off from the south by the glaciers of Melville Bay, these Eskimos (Peary called them Arctic Highlanders) are probably the most primitive, and for that reason the most sturdy and independent, of all the natives of the far north. A few of them have made trips to Upernavik but as a rule their only contact with the outside world is through the trading station maintained by associates of the late Knud Rasmussen at Oomanak, and through occasional visits of ships in the summer. You can get a good idea of the people and the country by reading any of the number of books dealing with exploration on the northwest coast of Greenland.

The Great Bear Lake area has attracted much attention recently because of mining activities. The north end of the lake lies in the barrens, the lower shores in the rock-scrub country. Hunter Bay is the center of the mining district and within the last few years quite a settlement has sprung up, with several frontier stores, boarding houses and a post of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Most of the miners and prospectors going into the Great Bear Lake area go by rail from Edmonton to Waterways, thence by Hudson Bay Company river steamboat from McMurray, three miles below Waterways, to Fitzgerald, two hundred and eighty-six miles, via the Athabasca River, Lake Athabasca and the Slave River. At Fitzgerald there is a portage of sixteen miles to Fort Smith, gateway to the Northwest Territories. Rapids make the river impassable, and all passengers and freight must go over the wagon road to Smith.

At Fort Smith the Mounted Police scrutinize all persons going into the Territories, to see that they are equipped with the proper permits and are financially responsible. This is a precaution taken by the government to make sure that greenhorns don't enter the north on a shoestring and become a charge upon the country.

From Smith the Hudson Bay river boats go down the Mackenzie and up the Bear River to Great Bear Lake. Other boats continue down to Aklavik, on the Arctic coast. This is the boat you'd take to get to Fort MacPherson.

Several aerial transport companies carry passengers and freight, as well as mail, "down north," the usual route to Great Bear being from Waterways to Resolution, on Great Slave Lake, thence to Rae and along the Camsell River to Echo Bay. Some high-class freight is carried from Waterways to Rae by boat and thence by air to Great Bear.

McPherson is a small settlement of importance only as a trading center.

THE puppy will do as you tell him—if you tell him often enough.

Request:—I have a six months old toy fox terrier. I heard that these dogs were very quick to pick up tricks, but I don't know how or where to start. Can you send me some pointers?

—Peter Cuomo, New York, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. John B. Thompson:—Feed your dog once a day all it will eat. It should have for a regular diet, two-thirds meat and one-third vegetables and cereals.

While teaching any trick never use but one command for it. Never keep your dog at it more than ten minutes. Never try to teach more than one trick at a time.

To shake hands: take hold of dog's paw and say "shake hands." Do it repeatedly every day for several days and the dog will learn it.

To drop: grab dog near the root of his tail and force him down, saying, "down."

To make the dog sit up: Place him on his hindquarters, against the wall in a corner, tapping under the chin to balance him while you say, "sit up."

To jump through your arms: Place dog in a corner and crowd him so he cannot get away without jumping through your arms. Say, "jump."

SIX thousand miles is to six as a steamship is to a dog sled. The paradox of plenty, in Alaska.

Request:—Have any oil wells been discovered in Alaska? If so where are they located?

Have they been successful? At what season of the year are these oil wells worked?

—Gerald Rother, Chicago, Ill.

Reply by Mr. T. S. Solomons:—Oil was discovered in Alaska in very early days around southern coastal Alaska in the Catalla region, but nothing much was done about it for years. There were just oil seepages, of course.

Practically at the time men began to think of developing it commercially, especially for local utilization, there came the government urge toward "conservation," and oil was reserved as well as coal. Forests had already been made into National Forests, by the way.

Oil later was found on the northern and northwestern coasts, or near it, and there has been considerable government prospecting and mapping of oil-bearing formations and the like. Little if anything has been done commercially with this oil, however, the transport problem being, at present, insoluble. In southern Alaska, however, oil may be worked under leases, in much the same way as coal is; but the industry has not been able to work out any profitable exploitation on a large scale, and what is produced is, as I understand, for restricted local consumption. Transportation is still the big problem in Alaska. Getting materials across the country, to the railroad or to a river, is difficult and expensive. Once got into a carrier, oil or its products, like all other commodities, may be taken thousands of miles with little added cost. Hence fuel of all sorts is still imported into Alaska in preference to utilizing a local supply if the conditions are not exactly right for using the latter. I developed the largest coal mine in the world a few decades ago in Alaska. That is, the content of the veins was larger than is known anywhere. We used a little of it locally but we had to compete—and not always successfully—with a better grade imported six or eight thousand miles against our fifteen miles. And there you have it!

The Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C., will give you all the dope, in the form of bulletins and the like, for nothing. Ask them.

A WORKING knowledge of history comes with a collection of medals.

Request:—In looking over a book published in 1912, I found plates of decorations of honor, among others, the Order of the Black Eagle (Prussian) and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. The latter, while showing a picture of the Order, did not specify what nation awarded it.

Could you give me a short history of both orders, why awarded, and was knighthood conferred automatically?

—Edward Whalen, Girard, Ill.

Reply by Mr. Howland Wood:—The Order of the Black Eagle was the highest Prussian decoration. The Order was limited to thirty chevaliers. Those receiving this Order already belonged to the nobility. Recipients, however, had certain rights, and if they had not the Order of the Red Eagle and the Order of the Crown they had the rights that the first class of these Orders conferred.

As for the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, this belongs to no one country. In fact, it is not a government Order. The Order itself was founded in the fourteenth century and was abolished by Napoleon in 1811 but was re-established by survivors of descendants in various countries in 1852. It generally has four classes. The various Orders in different countries are known as chapters or langues and for the most part have no official governmental status. One of the chief chapters was in Prussia and also there was an Austrian, a Spanish, and at one time a French Chapter, I think an Italian Chapter, and another chapter that seems to have had some Papal authority. The English Chapter, I think, is independent of the others. The badge of this Order is a long, very simple Maltese Cross in white enamel and the different chapters are differentiated by different insignia between the arms of the cross.

Very little is done on orders and decorations in this country and there are no good books on the subject published here. There are many books that have been in times past published in Europe, most of them are rather expensive. If one lived in a large city in this country they could pick up very frequently specimens of decorations in pawn shops and antique shops, but there is no one place that specializes in these. In England, Spink & Son, 5, 6 & 7 King St., St. James's, S. W. 1, London and A. H. Baldwin & Sons, 3 Robert St., Adelphi, London, W. C., have at times large stocks of these. The auction firm of Glendining and Company, 7 Argyll

St., Oxford Circus, W., London, have decorations in some of their sales. You will find both the books and the orders rather expensive and you should bear in mind that there is an extremely heavy duty on importing these into this country so that you would pay about seventy percent more than the price in Europe.

SPECIFICATIONS for a tournament casting rod.

Request:—I'm going to build myself a casting rod, for tournament work. I want to know which is the best length and weight to make a rod to use for five-eighths of plug-casting, and for extreme distance. All I want it for is distance casting.

—Harvey Rapp, Turlock, Calif.

Reply by Mr. H. B. Stanwood:—About all of the extreme distance casters use a six-foot rod and perhaps the larger average five and a half feet.

The chief objection to a six-foot rod is carrying it around. The weight should be about four and one-half to five ounces, when completed and the best cane should be used. Why don't you make the rod five foot and purchase an off-set handle which is nine and a half inches in length. These cost from $1.50 to $3 50 and can be purchased separately. The cost is according to their locking device.

This handle would cut down your total length of rod and balance it much better than a straight handle.

Don't overlook the new step-down steel bait rods of five and a half feet at a different range in prices. But don't buy a cheap one and then be sorry you did not get a better grade.

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Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1350 N Harvard Blvd., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 995 Pine St., San Francisco, Calif.

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Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, 1354 N. 4th St., Columbus, Ohio.

Tournament Fly and Bait Casting—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, School of Education, New York University, Washington Square, New York, N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American; north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and*

decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Automobiles and Aircraft Engines: *design, operation and maintenance*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure*.

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachute gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Ethnology: (*Eskimo*)—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry: *in the United States; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

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MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE SUBJECTS

Army Matters: *United States and Foreign*—CAPT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, 5511 Cabanne Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 251 Third St., Fair Haven, N. J.

Navy Matters: *United States and Foreign*—LT. COMDR. VERNON C. BIXBY, U. S. N. (retired), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Fla.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—PATRICK LEE, 11 Franklin Pl., Great Neck, Long Is., N. Y.

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U. S. Coast Guard—COMDR. VERNON C. BIXBY, U.S.N. (ret.), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Florida.

U. S. Marine Corps and Civilian Conservation Corps—CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, R. F. D. 1, Box 614, La Canada, Calif.

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Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Quart Ariz., care Conner Field.

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★**New Zealand; Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

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★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

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Newfoundland—C. T. JAMES, Box 2064, St. John's, Newfoundland.

Greenland—*Dog-teams, whaling, Eskimos, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada, Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island*—FRED L. BOWDEN, 104 Fairview Ave., Binghamton, N. Y. 2 ★*Southeastern Quebec.*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 24 Plessis St., Quebec, Canada. 3 ★*Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.*—S. E. SANGSTER, care *Adventure*. 4 ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier*

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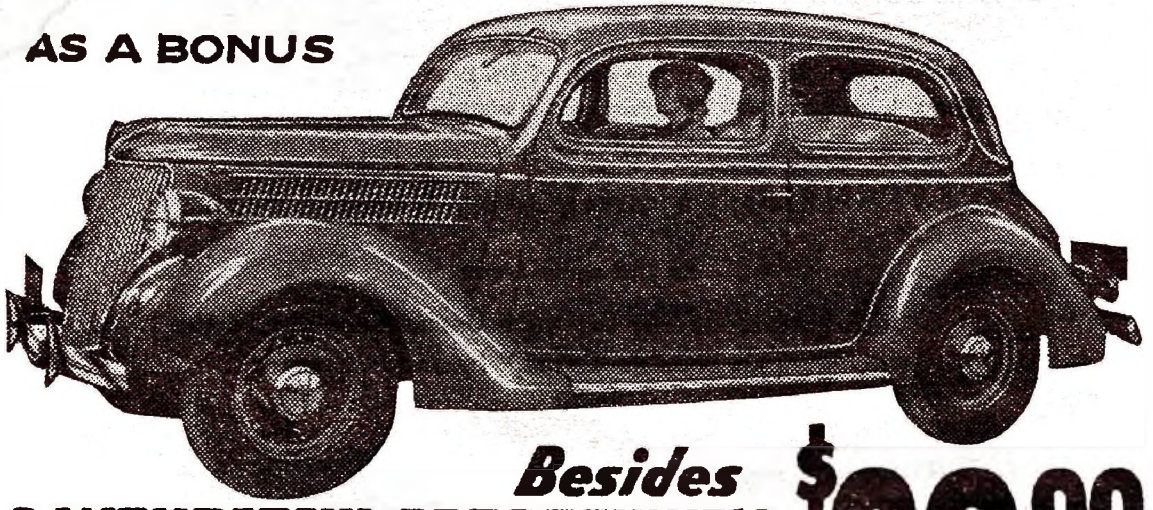

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You will act as Local Distributor for my million-dollar company. You will look after your customers' orders, fill them, and take in the money. The complete distributors' equipment and simple plans that I send you make possible big earnings from the first day. You don't need experience or previous training. You can operate on my capital. If you are honest, ambitious, can write down orders and count up your collections, you have the qualifications to succeed in this business. Even starting part time you can enjoy earnings up to $27.50 a week for yourself. If you are able and willing to put in eight hours a day, you can make up to $60.00 a week, and even more when you become better established.

Ford Sedans Given Producers

If you decide to take up my proposition, just as soon as you show me you mean business I'll give you a brand new Ford Tudor Sedan. I give automobiles as a bonus to producers to enable them to cover larger territories, and also to encourage prompt service to their customers.

Send No Money

Don't send any money—just mail the coupon. All I want is a chance to lay the facts before you so you can decide for yourself. If you want an exceptional opportunity to make up to $60.00 a week—with the backing of an old, reliable, million-dollar manufacturing company—then fill out and mail the coupon—or a penny postcard—and see how easy it is to get started under my new plan. Remember, there is no long wait or delay before you begin to make money. Your earnings start at once. So don't miss this chance. It doesn't cost any more than a postage stamp to investigate. You have everything to gain by mailing the coupon, so do it today—RIGHT NOW!

Wonderful Success Reported by Others

Just let me know you are interested by returning the coupon below, so I can lay before you bona fide evidence of what others are making. I'll show you how Wilbur Whitcomb of Ohio made $146.00 in a single week. R. E. Teague, California, cleared $19.50 in a day. Hans Coordes of Nebraska made $96.40 in a week. Helen V. Woolmington of Pennsylvania made as high as $22.00 in a single day. Max Barrett of Washington netted $62.00 in one week, and he reported that he cleared $220.00 in a single month. W. J. Way, Kansas, made $78.15 in a week. These are only a few of the scores of big earning reports which I received from every corner of the nation from persons who accepted this opportunity. And right now, I'm ready to offer you a proposition even better than the one I gave these people!

MAIL COUPON Now

ALBERT MILLS
1594 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Send me free facts. Tell me how I can start at once making up to $45 to $60 a week and get a new 5-Cylinder Ford Sedan in addition to my regular cash earnings.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

ALBERT MILLS, Pres., 1594 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

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When I say that these are the greatest values that we have been able to offer in 56 years, I am ready to prove it. Even my father who founded this business 56 years ago—in the days of low prices—could not have done better. Look at these beautiful new rings and watches—look at the low prices. Let me send you your choice on money back guarantee. Here's how you do it. Simply put a $1.00 bill in an envelope with your name, address, number of article wanted and tell me your age (must be over 20), occupation, employer and a few facts about yourself. This information will be held strictly confidential—no direct inquiries made. I'll open a 10-month charge account for you and send your selection for approval and 10-day free trial. If it isn't all I say about it and more—send it back and your dollar bill will be refunded immediately. If satisfied, you pay the balance in 10 small monthly payments that you will never miss.

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A2—Stunning flower design in 14K natural and white gold. High quality brilliant diamond. $2.10 a month.

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Sworn Perfect diamonds conform with the Federal Trade Commission ruling which provides that diamonds described as such must be without spots, flaws or carbon. You get an affidavit with purchase attested to by our diamond expert.

1287—Men like this 10K yellow gold initial ring with initials and [illegible] onyx. $1.60 a mo.

A-284—Smart engagement ring in 14K white gold with 5 high quality diamonds. $2.90 a month.

A1/C6—Bridal Ensemble at a low price. Both rings carved to match in 14K white gold; 5 diamonds in each ring. $3.15 a month.

R-1—Bulova's Miss America—a dainty baguette with beautifully engraved case. 7 jewels. $2.38 a month.

2176—This watch for men is a reproduction of a $75.00 model. Numerals on case in enamel background. 7 jewels. Link chain band. $1.38 a month.

1842—This dainty baguette watch formerly sold for $29.50. It's set with 2 brilliant diamonds. 7 jewels. $1.90 a month.

R-4—Ladies' Bulova watch. New round style. 7 jewels. Black silk cord band. $2.38 a month.

P-103—Ladies' Kent—round style at special low price. 7 jewels. Black silk cord band. $1.55 a month.

M-1—Bulova Commodore—a new round watch for men. 15 jewel movement. New style link bracelet. $2.38 a month.

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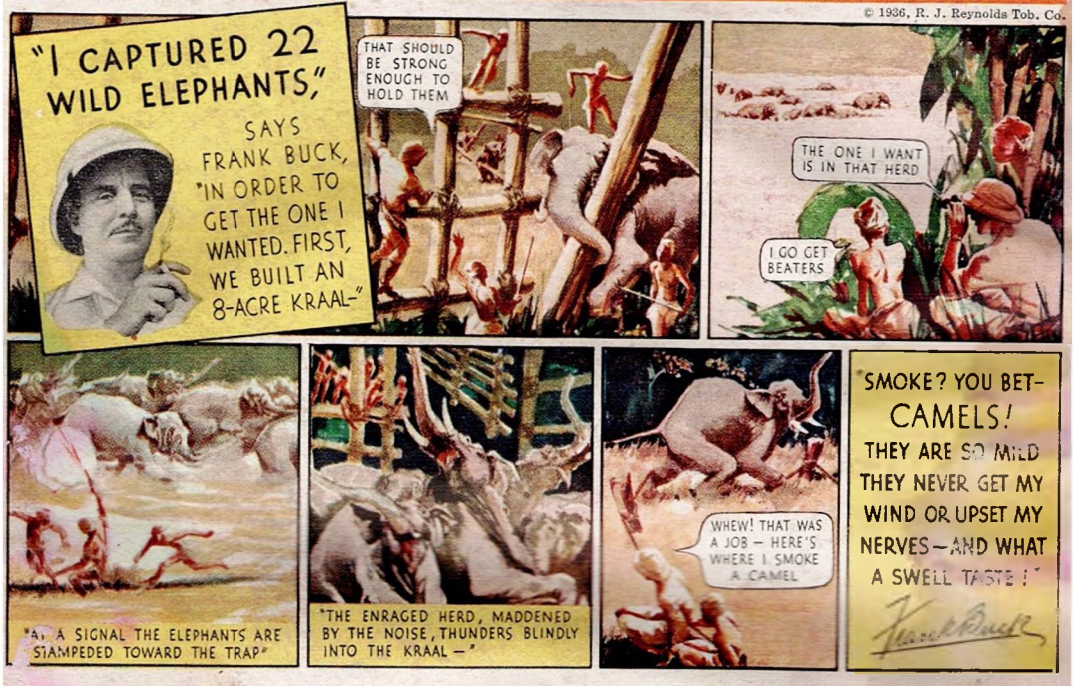

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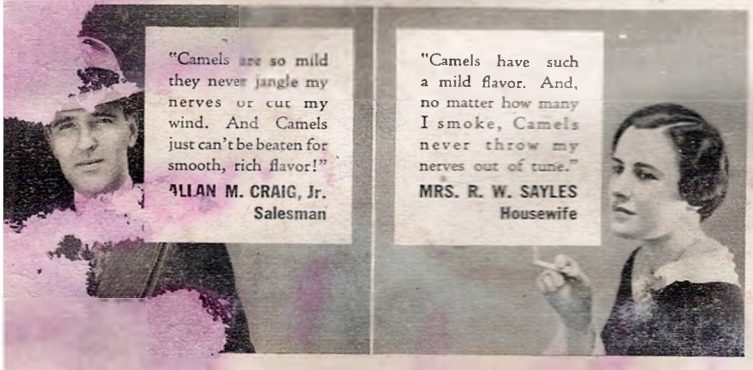

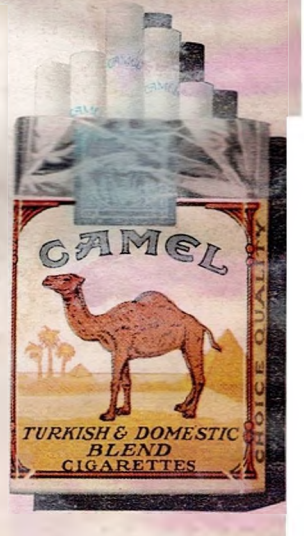

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